NATION

Cops: Allu Arjun didn't leave theatre despite fan's death

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BUSINESS

After merger, Nissan-Honda to be 3rd largest automaker

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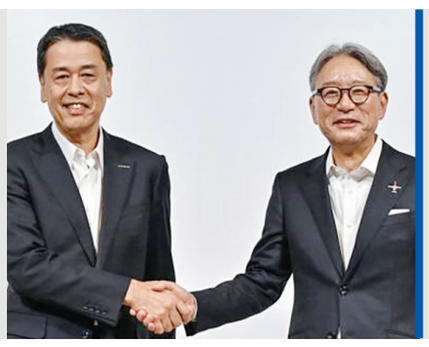

SPORTS

India not able to take 20 wickets: Pujara

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

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EAM to visit US from 24-29 December

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will pay a six-day visit to the US beginning Tuesday. It will be the first high-level visit from India to the US after Donald Trump won the presidential election. "External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will visit the United States of America from 24-29 December," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said. "He will be meeting counterparts to discuss key bilateral, regional and global issues," it said in a brief statement. The MEA said Jaishankar will also chair a conference of the Consul Generals of India in the US. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Ex-SC judge V Ramasubramanian now NHRC Chief

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

Former Supreme Court judge V Ramasubramanian has been appointed the new chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission, the rights panel said on Monday. The post of NHRC chairperson had been lying vacant since Justice (retd) Arun Kumar Mishra completed his tenure on 1 June. Mishra served as the eighth chairperson of the rights panel and was appointed to its top post in June 2021. A former chief justice of India or a retired judge of the top court are appointed as NHRC chairperson by the president on the recommendation of the selection committee. Former CJIs HL Dattu and KG Balakrishnan are among those who have headed the rights body in the past. *—PTI*

ISRO to launch SpaDeX Mission on 30 Dec

BENGALURU, 23 DEC

India's SpaDeX mission, intended to develop and demonstrate technology required to dock and undock spacecraft in space, will be launched using PSLV-C60 on 30 December from Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota, ISRO said. On 21 December, the launch vehicle was integrated and moved to the First Launch Pad, for further integration of satellites and launch preparations. On 30 December, people can witness the launch live at the Launch View Gallery after registering for it. The registration started on Monday at 6 pm, ISRO said in its website. *—PTI*

3 Khalistani terrorists killed in Pilibhit encounter

Militants were 'Pak-sponsored', involved in Gurudaspur attack

PILIBHIT/CHANDIGARH, 23 DEC

Three suspected Khalistani terrorists allegedly involved in the grenade attack in Gurdaspur were killed in an encounter with police in Pilibhit early Monday, with Punjab's Director General of Police Gaurav Yadav terming it as a major breakthrough against a Pakistan-sponsored terror module.

The success comes after three blasts which took place in different districts of Punjab this month.

The gunfight between members of the Khalistan Zindabad Force (KZF) and a joint team of Uttar Pradesh Police and Punjab Police took place in Puranpur area of Pilibhit after three module members opened fire at the police party.

DGP Yadav said the three have been identified as Varinder Singh alias Ravi, 23), Gurvinder Singh, 25, and Jashanpreet Singh alias Partap Singh, 18.

They are residents of Kalanaur police station and are accused of hurling a hand grenade at the Bakshiwala police post in Kalanaur in Punjab's Gurdaspur district on December 18, a Punjab police statement said on Monday. No one was injured in the Bakshiwala incident.

Terrorist organisation KZF had later used social media platform to claim the responsibility for this act of terror.

Amitabh Yash, Additional Director General (Law and Order), Uttar Pradesh Police said the trio was involved in the grenade attack on a police checkpoint in Gurdaspur.

Two AK-47 rifles, two Glock pistols and a huge cache of ammunition were seized from them, he said.

Investigations are underway to expose all the connections and members of the module and more recoveries and arrests are likely, he said.

Referring to the grenade attack, Congress MP Sukhjinder Randhawa said, "Till today, police were not accepting that there was an attack. They claimed that a tyre had exploded."

He alleged a "big conspiracy" is underway to destabilise Punjab and the state is being harmed. Industries are leaving, people don't want to work here, youngsters are leaving as they are afraid, he told PTI Videos. *—PTI*

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This combo image shows arms and other items recovered at the site of an encounter of three terror suspects **PHOTO: PTI**

INDIA SAYS 'NO COMMENT'

B'desh requests India to extradite Sheikh Hasina

DHAKA/NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

Bangladesh's interim government on Monday said it has sent a diplomatic note to New Delhi requesting for extradition of deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who has been living in India since fleeing Bangladesh in August.

Bangladesh's de facto foreign minister Touhid Hossain said Dhaka wants Hasina back to face the judicial process.

"We have sent a note verbale to the Indian government saying that Bangladesh wants her back here for the judicial process," Hossain told reporters in Dhaka.

It is learnt that the diplomatic note or note verbale was handed over to India's external affairs ministry by the Bangladeshi high commission in New Delhi.

Indian government sources confirmed receiving the note verbale. There was no comment from the ministry.

Hasina, 77, has been living in India since August 5 when she fled the country following a massive student-led protest that toppled her 16-year regime.

Sheikh Hasina **PHOTO: PTI**

Bangladesh-based International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) has issued arrest warrants for Hasina and several former Cabinet ministers, advisers, and military and civil officials for "crimes against humanity and genocide".

Earlier on Monday, Home Adviser Jahangir Alam said his office sent a letter to the foreign ministry to facilitate the ousted premier's extradition from India.

Alam said an extradition treaty between Dhaka and New Delhi already exists and Hasina could be brought back to Bangladesh under it.

The relations between India and Bangladesh came under strain after the interim government headed by Yunus came to power. *—PTI*

Centre scraps 'no-detention policy' for classes 5 and 8

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

The Indian government has officially abolished the 'no-detention policy' for students in classes 5 and 8 within its schools, enabling them to fail students who do not meet year-end examination requirements. This decision follows the amendment to the Right to Education Act (RTE) in 2019, spurring at least 18 states and Union Territories to eliminate the policy in those grades.

A recent gazette notification clarifies that students who do not meet promotion criteria after regular examinations will be given additional support and an opportunity for a re-examination within two months of results being announced. Should they again fail to meet promotion standards, they will remain in their current class. During this period, teachers are tasked with guiding both the students and their parents, identifying and addressing any learning gaps.

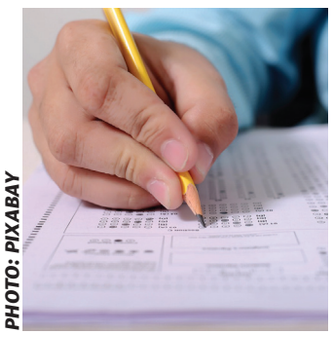


PHOTO: PIXABAY

- Students who do not meet promotion criteria after regular examinations will be given support and an opportunity for a re-examination within two months of results

Importantly, the government has stated that no child will be expelled from school before completing their elementary education. The upcoming examinations will emphasise competencies aimed at fostering holistic development rather than rote memorisation.

The policy change will affect approximately 3,000 central government-run schools, including Kendriya Vidyalayas and Sainik Schools. Although school education falls under state jurisdiction, 16 states and two Union Territories, including Delhi, have already discarded the no-detention policy. Haryana and Puducherry have yet to decide, while other states continue to support the previous policy. *—PTI*

9 industrial projects worth ₹9,823 cr get K'taka's nod

BENGALURU, 23 DEC

Karanataka government on Monday approved nine industrial projects with a total investment of Rs 9,823.31 crore, which are expected to create 5,605 jobs.

The projects were approved at the 64th meeting of the State High Level Clearance Committee (SHLCC), headed by Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah.

While three of these are new investment proposals, the remaining six involve expansions or amendments to existing plans.

According to an official statement, the approved new projects include DN Solutions India Private Limited's Rs 998 crore investment at the ITIR, Devanahalli, expected to create 467 jobs; Silectric Semiconductor Manufacturing Private Limited's Rs 3,425.60 crore project at Kochanahalli, Mysuru, aimed at generating 460 jobs; and Sansera Engineering Limited's Rs 2,150 crore project at Harohalli, which is estimated to create 3,500 jobs.

Urging investors acquiring KIADB (Karanataka Industrial Area Development Board) plots to operationalise their units within the prescribed timelines, he cautioned that penalties would be imposed on those failing to comply with the guidelines.

Siddaramaiah further added that the government is exploring the possibility of profit-sharing between sugar mills and farmers and instructed officials to examine similar practices in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu the statement added. *—PTI*

Chennai born Sriram is US AI policy advisor

WASHINGTON DC, 23 DEC

US president-elect Donald Trump named Indian American entrepreneur, capitalist and author Sriram Krishnan as Senior White House Policy Advisor on Artificial Intelligence.

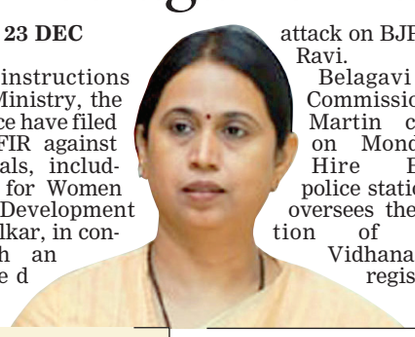
Sriram Krishnan will serve as the Senior Policy Advisor for Artificial Intelligence at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, Trump said on Sunday as he announced a number of appointments on artificial intelligence or AI.

Krishnan, who has previously led product teams at Microsoft, Twitter, Yahoo!, Facebook and Snap, will work along with David O. Sacks who will be the White House AI & Crypto Czar. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 6

FIR filed against Laxmi, 9 others in CT Ravi attack attempt

BELAGAVI, 23 DEC



Following instructions from Home Ministry, the Belagavi police have filed a suo-motu FIR against ten individuals, including Minister for Women and Child Development Laxmi Hebbalkar, in connection with an attempted attack on BJP MLC CT Ravi.

Belagavi Police Commissioner Ada Martin confirmed on Monday that Hire Bagewadi police station, which oversees the jurisdiction of Suvarna Vidhana Soudha, registered the case. Ravi, who was in police custody on 19 December, submitted a written complaint to the Khanapur police, naming several unidentified individuals, including Minister Lakshmi. The case was later transferred to the Hire Bagewadi police station.

The commissioner clarified that Ravi was taken into custody outside west-side staircase of the Vidhana Soudha, contrary to claims that he was detained inside the building. He emphasised that all necessary procedures were followed during the arrest.

Martin also revealed that the department had requested permission from the Chairman of the Upper House, Basavaraj Horatti, for a spot verification inside the Soudha, where Ravi allegedly used derogatory language against the minister. However, as of now, no response has been received.

In response to the FIR, Minister Laxmi expressed her outrage, stating that Ravi's use of offensive language against her had insulted all women, including his own wife and daughter. *—Salar News*

>>>More on Page 2

GST on Popcorn: FM clarifies rates

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

The Union Finance Minister clarified on Monday that GST rates on popcorn vary based on its category. During the 55th GST Council Meeting on 21 December 21, reports of an 18 per cent GST on popcorn sparked public dissatisfaction. To address the confusion and concerns over rising costs, the Finance Minister outlined the tax structure. The Council explained that GST rates depend on the type of popcorn. Ready-to-eat popcorn mixed with salt and spices is classified under HS 2106 90 99. It attracts 5 per cent GST if sold unpackaged and 12 per cent GST if pre-packaged and labelled. However, caramel popcorn, blended with sugar and classified under HS 1704 90 90, is subject to 18 per cent GST as it falls under the category of sugar confectionery. *—Agencies*

1934-2024

Parallel cinema pioneer Shyam Benegal dies days after 90th birthday

MUMBAI, 23 DEC

Shyam Benegal, who heralded a new era in Hindi cinema with the 'parallel movement' in the 1970s and 1980s with classics such as 'Ankur', 'Mandi' and 'Manthan', died on Monday after battling chronic kidney disease. He was 90.

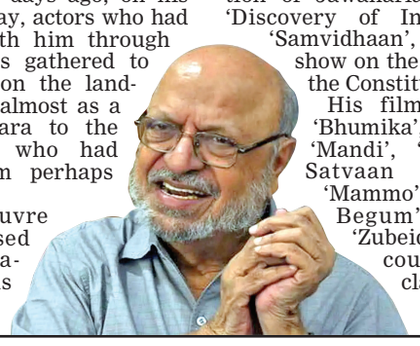
The filmmaker, a star in the pantheon of Indian cinema's great auteurs, died at Mumbai's Wockhardt Hospital where he was admitted in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU).

He is survived by his daughter and wife Nira Benegal.

Just nine days ago, on his 90th birthday, actors who had worked with him through the decades gathered to wish him on the landmark day, almost as a last sayonara to the filmmaker who had given them perhaps best roles.

His oeuvre encompassed documentaries, films and epic television shows, including 'Bharat Ek Khoj', an adaptation of Jawaharlal Nehru's 'Discovery of India', and 'Samvidhaan', a 10-part show on the making of the Constitution.

His films include 'Bhumika', 'Junoon', 'Mandi', 'Suraj Ka Satvaan Ghoda', 'Mammo', 'Sardari Begum' and 'Zubeidaa', most counted as classics. *—PTI*



9 Ayyappa devotees injured in LPG blast in Hubballi

HUBBALLI, 23 DEC

Nine devotees of Lord Ayyappa sustained serious burn injuries due to a LPG cylinder blast at a Shiva temple here, police said on Monday.

According to police, the incident occurred on Sunday night in Sainagar in the City. The devotees were sleeping in the temple room when the tragedy took place.

All nine injured were immediately admitted to KIMS Hospital. Their condition is said to be critical, police sources said.

Police suspect that the devotees did not turn off the cylinder knob properly after cooking food, resulting in the blast.

The devotees were planning a trip to Sabarimala Lord Ayyappa temple in Kerala. *—PTI*

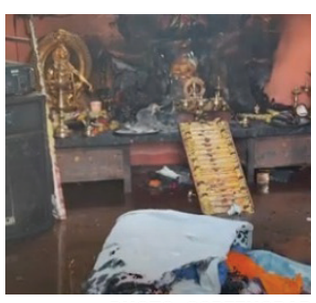


PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

1 dead, 2 injured in separate City accidents

BENGALURU 23 DEC

One person died and two people were injured in two separate accidents in the City on Monday. In the first incident, a 24-year-old truck driver, Azharuddin from Haryana, died early Monday morning at APMC market within Yeshwanthpur traffic police station limits. He was crushed between two trucks while unloading garlic sacks. In the second incident on Sunday, a KSRTC bus with brake failure caused a serial collision near Jnanabharathi Metro Station on Mysuru Road. *—Salar News*

BTP cracks down on traffic violators, collects ₹2.41L fine

BENGALURU, 3 DEC

As part of its ongoing efforts to curb over speeding and drunk driving in the city, the Bengaluru Traffic Police (BTP) conducted a special drive from 16 to 22 December, booking numerous offenders and collecting fines amounting to Rs 2.41 lakh. During the week-long initiative, BTP personnel checked over 60,903 vehicles across Bengaluru. A total of 769 cases were registered against drivers caught under the influence of alcohol, while 241 cases involved over speeding violations. The Bengaluru Traffic Police reiterated its commitment to road safety. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: X

Man arrested for posing as Lokayukta official

MANGALURU, 23 DEC

A man was arrested for posing as a Lokayukta officer and attempting to extort money via WhatsApp, Ullal police said. According to a press release from the Commissioner of Police, Mangaluru, Dhananjaya Reddy Thota, 31 allegedly called Purushottam, a panchayat officer, posing as a Lokayukta official. He demanded money to "resolve" an alleged corruption case. Suspicious of the caller's identity, Purushottam alerted authorities, prompting an investigation. Tracing the call led police to Andhra Pradesh, where Thota was apprehended on Saturday. Preliminary investigations revealed that he had no connection to the Lokayukta and was using the scheme to exploit officials by leveraging fear of legal action. Ullal police are now probing whether Thota was involved in similar scams elsewhere. *—Salar News*

Kalaburagi woman injured after live wire falls on her

KALABURAGI, 23 DEC

A woman sustained burn injuries after an overhead live wire snapped and fell on her in the district headquarters town of Kalaburagi on Monday. The woman has been admitted to a private hospital with injuries to her hands, legs and stomach. According to police, the electric wire fell on the school bus carrying intellectually disabled children and then landed on the woman. The incident comes close on the heels of a 14-year-old boy dying of electrocution in the town on 13 December. *—PTI*

Mysuru Zoo, Karanji Lake to be open today

Mysuru Zoo and Karanji Lake Nature Park will be open to the public on Tuesday (24/12/2024) and Wednesday (25/12/2024) in celebration of the Christmas Festival.

No proof of Ravi abusing: Horatti

He said Council media has not given him proof

BENGALURU, 23 DEC

PHOTO: X

Legislative Council Chairman Basavaraj Horatti on Monday provided clarity on the incident involving BJP MLC CT Ravi, stating that no proof was presented by the legislative council's media regarding the issue. Horatti revealed that he personally reached out to both CT Ravi and Congress leader Lakshmi Hebbalkar to discuss the matter, underlining that both sides stood firm on their positions.

Horatti said, "We have not received any proof from our council media... So I first called CT Ravi and asked if he wanted to compromise, he said 'no' and then I called her (Lakshmi Hebbalkar), she said 'no, we are bent upon our statement.'"

Horatti further explained that a thorough discussion was held with the council's secretary and other officials. "We discussed thoroughly with the secretary and other people, studied all the books, and gave our ruling," he added.

Notably, BJP leaders, including MLC DS Arun and Prof SV Sankanura, had previously complained to the Home Department Secretary after Ravi's initial complaint was not accepted. The case was ultimately filed based on a complaint by Kishora B.R.

On Sunday, CT Ravi questioned the rationale behind his recent arrest and multiple transfers across four districts. Expressing confidence in public support, he raised concerns over the security arrangements, criticizing the government's claim of "security reasons" for his relocation. *—PTI*

Protesters booked for attacking Ravi

A case has been filed against individuals who attempted to attack BJP MLC CT Ravi on 19 December at Suvarna Soudha. The complaint was filed at the Hirebagewadi police station, alleging that CT Ravi's life was threatened and that the attackers intended to kill him. BJP leaders, including MLC DS Arun and Prof SV Sankanura, had previously complained to the Home Department.

Will not forgive Ravi at all: Hebbalkar

She asks CM to act against Ravi, to approach PM

BELAGAVI, 23 DEC

PHOTO: ANI

Minister Laxmi Hebbalkar on Monday asserted that she will continue her legal fight seeking justice in connection with BJP MLC CT Ravi allegedly using a derogatory word against her and said that she will request Legislative Council Chairman Basavaraj Horatti and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to ensure swift action.

There is no question of forgiving Ravi at any cost, she said, and added that she will also seek justice from Prime Minister Narendra Modi and would write a letter to President Droupadi Murmu.

"If I get an opportunity, I will meet the prime minister and bring to his notice the injustice that has happened to me," she said.

Ravi allegedly used a derogatory word against Hebbalkar in the Legislative Council on December 19 during an altercation between them, when the House was adjourned for a while. He was arrested on the same day evening and taken into the police van from the premises of Suvarna Vidhana Soudha in Belagavi, where the legislature session was held, based on Hebbalkar's complaint.

"For two days, I had gone into silence because I was shocked. I had never heard such a thing from anybody. I have come forward in politics fighting injustice. There was no red carpet for me in my career. I have struggled for 26 years and come to this level," Hebbalkar told reporters here. Hitting out at BJP, she said, she feels pity about -- state BJP President BY Vijayendra, Leader of Opposition R Ashoka and saffron party leaders from her Panchamasali Lingayat community Basangouda Patil Yatna and Arvind Bellad -- for supporting a person who made a woman feel "disgusted". *—PTI*

- Ravi allegedly used a derogatory word against Hebbalkar in the Legislative Council on December 19 during an altercation between them, when the House was adjourned for a while. He was arrested on the same day evening and taken into the police van.

I am still alive and heading Cong in State, says DKS

BELAGAVI, 23 DEC

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Monday dismissed BJP's protests and reaffirmed his leadership of the Congress party, stating, "I am very much alive and heading the Congress party. I am not scared of BJP's protest tactics."

Speaking to reporters during the centenary celebrations of Mahatma Gandhi's presidency at the 1924 Congress convention in Belagavi, Shivakumar drew parallels to Gandhi's unwavering resolve. "Mahatma Gandhi achieved independence through his resolute fight. Should we be scared when we are remembering the Mahatma?" he said.

When asked about Union Minister Pralhad Joshi's allegation of a conspiracy to eliminate BJP MLC CT Ravi in a fake encounter, Shivakumar deferred, saying, "The Home Minister and the police will respond to this. I have no comment."

Meanwhile, Joshi also alleged that the present Congress party is "duplicate Congress" led by fake "Gandhis" and noted that they were not the inheritors of party that was there during Gandhi's time.

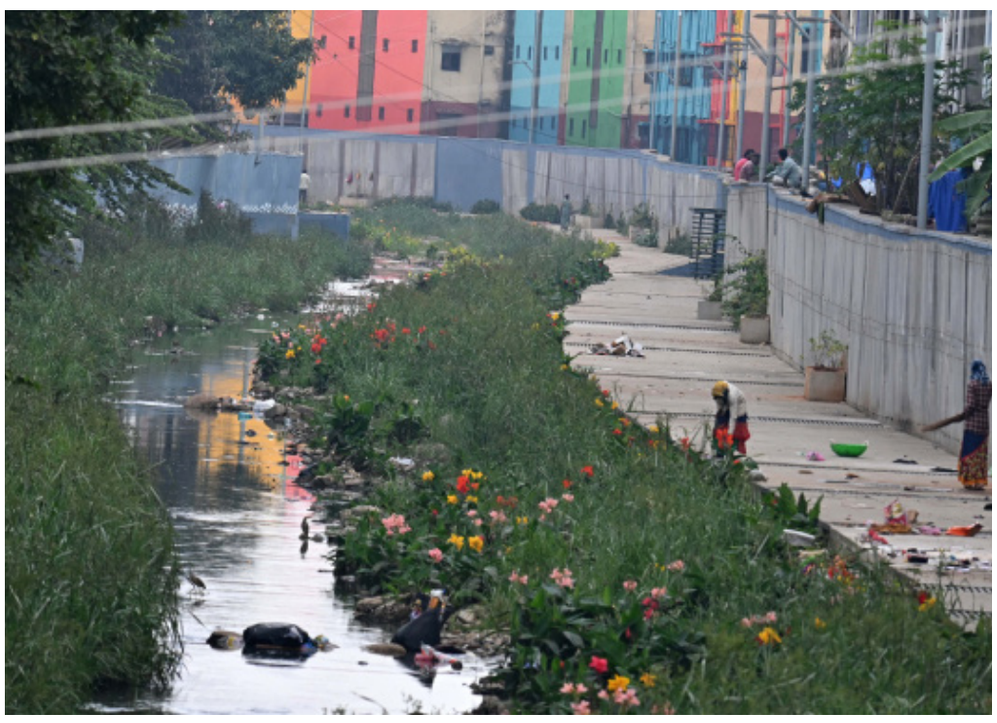
He also said that government money was being used by the ruling party for the centenary celebrations of the 1924 Indian National Congress session that was presided over by Gandhi in Belagavi.

The 39th session of the Indian National Congress held in Belagavi was the only Congress session presided over by Mahatma Gandhi.

Speaking to reporters here, he alleged that thousands of rupees from the government is being spent and decorative light arrangements have been done by Hubballi Electricity Supply Company (HESCOM) in Belagavi for the celebrations. "Entirely government money."

Meanwhile, State social welfare and district in charge minister HC Mahadevappa who took strong objections on statement of Joshi's statement on killing Ravi in a fake encounter said that people who have done wrongdoing find such excuses, makes false allegations against the state government. *—Salar News*

FROM EYESORE TO OASIS



An open stormwater drain (rajakaluve) connecting Koramangala to Shantinagar in Bengaluru has been transformed into a scenic space, featuring walkways, arch bridges, and vibrant flower plants, enhancing the City's landscape. **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Seer launches campaign for Panchamasali quota

BELAGAVI, 23 DEC

Lingayat Panchamasali Seer Basavajaya Mrityunjaya Swamiji said he will continue creating awareness about the need for 2A reservation for the community.

He said it to further strengthen the struggle for Panchamasali reservation rights and to create awareness against the govt's oppressive policy, the Panchamasali Pratigna Kranti Abhiyan will be launched, which will visit every village in the state. This campaign will start from Kudalsangama on 14 January.

Speaking at Kannada Sahitya Bhavan on Monday, Swamiji stated that awareness will be created under the policy of dialogue, negotiation, and conflict (Sanvada, Sandhana, Sangharsha). Meetings will also be held in the taluks, and suggestions from the people will be codified.

People from all corners of the state came to the Panchamasali reservation struggle held in Belagavi on 10 December. Several people were injured in the lathi charge carried out by the police. I have also given courage by providing Basava Rakshe Patra. Our struggle will start with the slogan, "You have shed blood, let's get reservation," he said.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said that giving reservation is unconstitutional. However, Swamiji lashed out, saying that his statement itself is unconstitutional.

We requested the police officers who lathi-charged to be suspended.

However, he complained that they did an incitement by giving a reward of Rs 10,000 and said that it has been proven that the government does not care much about the Panchamasali community. *—Salar News*

TRUCK DRIVER DEAD, SUICIDE SUSPECTED

BENGALURU 23 DEC

A 45-year-old truck driver was found dead at his residence in Mahalakshmi Layout in the city. Probe suggested that the man Swamy, may have ended his own life.

The incident occurred on Sunday. According to sources, Swamy had been struggling with depression, reportedly linked to suspicions about his wife's relationship with another man.

Sources close to the family told Salar News that Swamy's wife, who previously worked at Bengaluru University on a contractual basis, is alleged to have developed a friendship with a man named Mailarappa.

Adding to the tension, Mailarappa's wife is said to have recently visited Swamy's home to warn his wife against maintaining contact with her husband. *—Salar News*

Congress protests, seeks Shah's dismissal

MYSURU, 23 DEC

Congress also condemned the one nation one election **PHOTO: X**

District Congress staged a massive protest march from Sangolli Rayanna Circle to the Deputy Commissioner's office in Siddarthanagar, demanding the dismissal of Union Home Minister Amit Shah over his comments on B.R. Ambedkar during the Rajya Sabha constitution debate.

District Minister HC Mahadevappa, who led the march, accused Shah and the Union government of undermining the nation's constitutional values in pursuit of a "Hindu Rashtra" agenda. He also condemned the "one nation, one election" initiative and clarified that Ambedkar was defeated by a Hindu Mahasabha candidate, not Congress, which had not fielded a candidate against him. Mahadevappa urged the BJP to stop misleading the public.

MLA Tanveer Sait, addressing the gathering, criticized Shah's leadership, pointing out that he had been banished from Gujarat by the Supreme Court. Sait also warned against the BJP's attempts to destroy the constitutional principles drafted by Ambedkar, especially in its ongoing targeting of Muslims. *—Salar News*

MISCREANTS POSE AS TRAI OFFICIALS

City techie loses ₹11.8 cr to 'digital arrest'

BENGALURU, 23 DEC

According to police, the victim alleged that on 11 November **PHOTO: META**

A 39-year-old software engineer became a victim to a "digital arrest" scam and lost Rs 11.8 crore when fraudsters impersonating police officials claimed that his Aadhaar card was being misused to open bank accounts for money laundering, police said on Monday.

The fraud occurred between 25 November and 12 December, they said.

According to police, the victim alleged that on 11 November, he received a call from a person who claimed to be an officer of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India. The alleged officer claimed that his SIM card, was linked to the Aadhaar card, was used for illegal advertisements and harassment messages.

The fraudster further alleged that a case was registered in connection with this in Mumbai's Colaba Cyber Police Station.

Later, he got a call from a person claiming to be a police officer alleging that his Aadhaar details were being misused to open bank accounts for money laundering, the FIR stated.

He also got a call from a person asking him to download the Skype app following which a man, allegedly dressed in Mumbai police uniform video-called him and claimed that a businessman had opened a bank account using his Aadhaar to conduct transactions worth Rs 6 crore.

However, on 25 November, another man in police uniform called him and alleged that his case was being heard in the top court and threatened to arrest his family if he did not comply.

According to the FIR, the victim transferred a total sum of Rs 11.8 crore.

A case has been registered under the IT Act and relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) for cheating and cheating by impersonation, police said. *—PTI*

Top cop asks police to carry guns, batons for patrolling

BENGALURU, 23 DEC

City police commissioner B Dayananda on Monday instructed personnel to ensure that CCTV cameras in malls, pubs and public areas are in proper working conditions ahead of New Year celebrations

During a high-level meeting, the Commissioner instructed senior officers, including Additional Commissioners, Deputy Commissioners of Police, and other officials, to discreetly gather intelligence on organisations or individuals opposing New Year festivities. He emphasised the importance of taking precautionary measures to avert any untoward incidents on New Year.

"Special attention must be given to ensuring the safety of women during the celebrations," Dayananda stated. He directed immediate action against anyone involved in molestation or harassment, urging officers to respond swiftly to any emergencies.

With recent surges in rowdy attacks and drug peddling activities, the Commissioner highlighted the need for heightened vigilance. He instructed all personnel to carry essential equipment, including service revolvers, helmets, and batons, to be prepared for any contingencies.

Dayananda further ordered strict action against those engaging in disruptive behaviours, such as breaking bottles on roads or creating chaos outside bars and restaurants.

To maintain order, the police have deployed additional teams, with Hoysalas (mobile patrol units) and Cheetahs (bike patrolling) tasked with intensified patrolling across the city. *—Salar News*

1M govt jobs provided in last 18 months: PM

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced on Monday that his government has created nearly 1 million permanent government jobs for youths over the past eighteen months, a record achievement in Indian employment history. Speaking at a virtual event, he confirmed that more than 71,000 recruits were given appointment letters during the Rozgar Mela (Job Fair). Modi highlighted that the focus on the young population is central to his administration's policies, emphasising honesty and transparency in the recruitment process. He noted that many recruits are women and stressed his government's commitment to fostering self-dependence for women across all sectors. He praised the introduction of 26 weeks of maternity leave for women, which he claimed has significantly aided their careers. *—PTI*

Sikkim recognises CM as state's undisputed satrap

GANGTOK, 23 DEC

Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang's emergence as the undisputed satrap from Sikkim is the story of the year as he led the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) to a resounding victory in the April 2024 assembly polls. Joining the company of his predecessors, Nar Bahadur Bhandari and Pawan Kumar Chamling, the 56-year-old guided the SKM to register a whitewash in 31 out of the 32 assembly seats which were up for grabs. The ruling party rendered the assembly opposition-less and ensured an absolute margin in the House after Sikkim Democratic Front's lone MLA Tenzing Norbu Lamtha defected to the SKM three months later, swearing loyalty to the chief minister. Tamang retained power for a second successive term with 58.38 per cent votes, up 11.21 per cent compared to its 2019. *—PTI*

Priyanka slams Modi govt over GST on exam forms

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Monday attacked BJP over levying GST on examination forms, saying the government had turned the dreams of parents who saved every penny to prepare their children for exams into a source of income. Congress General Secretary shared an examination form of the Kalyan Singh Super Speciality Cancer Institute, Sultanpur Road, Lucknow, that showed 18 per cent GST was being charged. "After filling the form, if the paper is leaked due to the failure of the government then this money of the youngsters is wasted," she said. Meanwhile, Congress took a swipe at government over "rising" prices of food items, saying the bullet train announced by it has not arrived but the inflation, is spiralling faster than the speed of a bullet train. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

CPI(M) backs Vijayaraghavan's barbs at Gandhis

T'PURAM, 23 DEC

Kerala's ruling CPI(M) leaders on Monday rallied behind the party's politburo member A Vijayaraghavan in the raging political row over his remarks on the Lok Sabha poll victories of Congress leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra from Wayanad. He said that Rahul secured victory in the high-range segment twice with the support of communal forces and that extremist elements were present at Priyanka Gandhi's campaign rallies. Prominent Marxist party leaders said he did not say anything wrong and they would oppose minority communalism and majority communalism alike. *—PTI*

Punjab, UP cops foil ISI-sponsored terror plot

The blast outside the police station was the 2nd one in a week

PILIBHIT/CHANDIGARH, 23 DEC

In a major breakthrough against Pakistan ISI-sponsored KZF terror module, a joint operation of Punjab Police and Uttar Pradesh Police led to an encounter with three module members involved in grenade attack at Police establishment in Gurdaspur, on Monday.

According to a Punjab police statement, the DGP said preliminary investigation has revealed that this terror module is controlled by Pak-based Ranjeet Singh Nita, the chief of KZF, and operated by Greece-based Jaswinder Singh Mannu, a native of village Agwan village in Kalanaur.

Accused Varinder alias Ravi, who was leading the module, also belongs to Agwan village. He was being further controlled and masterminded by UK-based Jagjeet Singh and was using assumed identity of Fateh Singh Baghi to also claim the responsibility of the grenade attack, the DGP said, according to the statement.

Police and security personnel in Pilibhit, Uttar Pradesh, on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

In a post on X, DGP Yadav said, "This module is controlled by Ranjeet Singh Nita... It is further controlled by Jagjeet Singh, based in the #UK and serving in the #British Army. Jagjeet Singh used the identity of Fateh Singh Baggi."

Punjab government and BJP-led central government are hand in glove with each other, and the two are working towards the same goal -- how to finish Punjab, the MP alleged.

Randhawa said MPs from Punjab have also sought time from Union Home Minister Amit Shah on many occasions for a meeting but he "did not deem it important to hear us out".

"Punjab is a border state and Pakistan is fighting a proxy war with India through Punjab," he said, adding that he told Shah in Parliament that he needed to discuss an issue related to national security with him.

The blast outside the Bakshiwala police chowki was the second such incident in Punjab last week and the third this month.

The Islamabad police station incident had taken place a fortnight after a hand grenade was lobbed at a police post in Nawanshahr. Some people attacked Asron police post in the Kathgarn police station in Nawanshahr by hurling a hand grenade in its premises on 2 December. *—PTI*

'DELHI, NOW CORRUPTION LAB'

BJP MP Anurag Thakur, Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Vijender Gupta and others during BJP's release of chargesheet *PHOTO: PTI*

BJP issues 'chargesheet' against Kejri ahead of polls

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

Senior BJP leader Anurag Thakur on Monday issued a "chargesheet" against AAP National Convenor Arvind Kejriwal, accusing him of turning Delhi into a "corruption lab" through a series of "scams".

Ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls, the state unit of BJP has formed a "chargesheet committee" that has so far issued detailed reports listing ruling AAP MLAs' alleged failures.

"What kind of a party is this, which came to power promising to give a corruption-free government, but was involved in eight or nine scams related to the liquor policy, Delhi Jal Board, DTC and Waqf Board," Thakur said.

The elections for the 70-member Delhi Assembly are due in February next year.

Thakur also targeted the AAP and Kejriwal over education and health, alleging that it failed to open new Mohalla Clinics and hospitals, besides failing to use Central funds to improve the city's healthcare infrastructure.

He charged that the smog tower in Connaught Place, which was supposed to provide relief from air pollution, was lying defunct although the AAP government spent crores of rupees on advertisement. He also cited water shortage, lack of sanitation and damaged roads to corner the ruling AAP.

Thakur also alleged that the AAP has been supporting "anti-national" forces and Kejriwal questioned India's surgical strikes. He said the party got the support of "Khalistanti elements" during the Punjab polls. *—PTI*

Fadnavis calls Rahul's Parbhani visit hate-mongering

PUNE, 23 DEC

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Monday said Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's visit to Parbhani to meet the kin of a Dalit man who died in custody was "only for political reasons" and to "create hatred".

Earlier in the day, Gandhi met the kin of Somnath Suryavanshi in Parbhani and said the youth was killed because he was a Dalit and was protecting the Constitution.

Suryavanshi was among the more than 50 persons who were arrested after violence broke out there on 10 December following the desecration of a glass-enclosed replica of the Constitution near a statue of Babasaheb Ambedkar.

Suryavanshi, 35, a resident of Shankar Nagar in Parbhani, was lodged in Parbhani district central jail and died on 15 December at a state-run hospital after complaining of chest pain and uneasiness.

LoP in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi with family of Suryavanshi who allegedly died in police custody, in Parbhani district, Maharashtra *PHOTO: PTI*

On Monday, Gandhi alleged police killed Suryavanshi and asserted it was a ''cent per cent custodial death".

Speaking to reporters Fadnavis said, "Rahul Gandhi came only for political reasons. His job is to create hatred among people. We are investigating all the cases."

"If it is proved that the death occurred due to police assault, then no one will be spared," Fadnavis added. During the Winter Session of the assembly, which ended on 21 December, Fadnavis had informed that Suryavanshi had told a magistrate that he was not tortured. *—PTI*

FADNAVIS HINTS AT NATIONAL STAGE FOR BHUJBAL

MUMBAI, 23 DEC

Senior NCP leader Chhagan Bhujbal, who is sulking over not being included in the new Mahayuti government in Maharashtra, met Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis here on Monday.

Talking to reporters after the meeting, Bhujbal said he had an elaborate discussion with the Fadnavis on the prevailing political and social atmosphere in the state. In Pune, Fadnavis said there are plans to send Bhujbal to the "national stage" since Deputy CM Ajit Pawar wants the NCP to become a "national party".

"Fadnavis told me that the Other Backward Classes have played an important role in the landslide victory of the Mahayuti in the assembly elections (held on November 20) and he will take care that the OBC community's interest is not harmed," Chhagan Bhujbal said.

He also said Fadnavis has sought some time to think over the issues pertaining to OBCs. *—PTI*

Meitei, Kuki cadets to serve together in Manipur: Biren

DERGAON, 23 DEC

Biren Singh *PHOTO: PTI*

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Monday said the newly recruited police cadets, including those from Meitei and Kuki communities, will be posted together as a "team" in an attempt to bring back peace in the ethnic violence-hit northeastern state. Nearly 2,000 recruits of the Manipur Police passed out from the Lachit Borphukan Police Academy on Monday, strengthening the force in the state. Assam and Manipur Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya and Singh attended the ceremony as the chief guests.

"The community-wise division took place due to the present situation. It was not like this earlier, and I will not allow this to happen in future," the Chief Minister said.

Out of the 1,946 passed-out recruits, the caste distribution of them is diverse with 62 per cent being Meiteis, 12 per cent Kukis and the remaining 26 per cent belonging to the Naga and other tribes. *—PTI*

BJP MPs injured in Parl scuffle discharged

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

Two BJP MPs, Pratap Sarangi from Odisha and Mukesh Rajput from Uttar Pradesh, have been discharged from Ram Manohar Lohia (RML) Hospital after suffering head injuries during a scuffle between opposition and NDA members in the Parliament premises on 19 December. Both MPs were initially admitted to the ICU but were moved to a ward on Saturday as their condition improved. Sarangi, who has a history of heart problems, suffered a deep cut on his forehead, while Rajput lost consciousness immediately after the incident but was conscious upon arrival at the hospital. Initial MRI and CT scans did not reveal any significant injuries. In related developments, the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), responsible for the security of the Parliament House Complex, stated that there was "no lapse" on their part during the incident. CISF Deputy Inspector General (operations) Shrikant Kishore addressed the media, asserting that no weapons were allowed and emphasising that the force would refrain from responding to allegations made by MPs. The incident, which has sparked controversy, led to the Delhi Police filing an FIR against Congress leader and Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi after a complaint from the BJP. The scuffle occurred amidst heightened tensions during the Winter Session of Parliament, drawing attention to the volatile political climate. *—PTI*

'STOP THE DRAMA'

Apologise for insulting Ambedkar: BJP to Cong

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

The BJP on Monday accused the Congress of running a smear campaign against Union Home Minister Amit Shah and said, instead of indulging in such "drama", it should apologise for always "insulting and humiliating" BR Ambedkar.

It also accused the Congress of using out of context a small portion of Shah's recent speech in the Rajya Sabha in a bid to "establish its political identity".

The Congress has launched a weeklong nationwide campaign against Shah, alleging that he insulted Ambedkar with his remarks while participating in a debate on the Constitution in the Rajya Sabha last week.

INDIA bloc MPs protest against Home Minister Amit Shah over his remarks related to BR Ambedkar, at Parliament *PHOTO: PTI*

As part of the "Ambedkar Samman Saptah", Congress workers and leaders will hold marches and press conferences to remember Ambedkar's legacy, the party said on Saturday.

Hitting back, senior BJP leader and former Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad alleged that the Congress, which "always" insulted Ambedkar during his lifetime, was doing a "drama" of remembering his legacy. "The Congress, which always insulted BR Ambedkar, is holding press conferences across the country... Stop this drama. Stop this hypocrisy," Prasad said in a press conference at the party headquarters.

"The Congress must tender an unconditional apology for all the insults and humiliations done to BR Ambedkar during his lifetime and to his legacy after his death. First of all, publicly apologise and then hold press conferences," he added.

Prasad also said that the people of the country were very mature. "Its (Congress) efforts will not succeed." *—PTI*

'DETRIMENTAL TO FEDERALISM'

Bills for ONOE referred to JPC, 12th since 2015

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

Two significant bills aimed at establishing a legal framework for simultaneous elections across the country have been referred to a joint committee of Parliament for further examination. This marks the 12th set of draft laws initiated for joint scrutiny since 2015.

The opposition in the Lok Sabha has labelled these bills as detrimental to federalism, prompting the government to allocate them to the joint committee for enhanced consultation and detailed evaluation. The first piece of legislation, the Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, proposes a mechanism for conducting Lok Sabha and assembly elections concurrently. Given its constitutional amendment nature, it requires the support of two-thirds of the members present and voting to pass.

The panel's findings will be submitted to Houses, with dissenting opinions allowed for those who disagree with the majority's conclusions *PHOTO: PTI*

The second bill, the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, seeks to align the terms of the legislative assemblies for Delhi, Puducherry, and Jammu and Kashmir with those of other state assemblies. This "ordinary" bill necessitates only a simple majority for approval.

The most recent bill referred before these was the Waqf (Amendment) Bill. According to parliamentary procedure, if one House decides to send a bill to a joint committee, it will notify the other House to appoint members to the committee. The committee will assess the bill clause by clause, allowing members to propose amendments and gather insights from relevant associations and experts.

Past bills undergoing similar scrutiny include the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (Second Amendment) Bill, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2015, among others. The joint committee's findings will be submitted to the Houses, with dissenting opinions allowed for those who disagree with the majority's conclusions. *—PTI*

Poll rule changes pose threat to fair elections, says Stalin

CHENNAI, 23 DEC

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin has accused the BJP-led central government of posing a threat to democracy following what he described as a reckless amendment to the Conduct of Election Rules, aimed at undermining election transparency. Stalin, who is also the President of the ruling DMK, expressed his concerns regarding the recent amendment, which he claims seeks to prevent public access to vital election documents, including CCTV footage, as a direct response to a directive from the Punjab and Haryana High Court.

On X, Stalin said, "Democracy is facing its gravest threat under the BJP-led government with the reckless amendment of Section 93(2)(a) of the Conduct of Election Rules, to kill transparency in elections." He said this move threatens to erode one of the fundamental principles of Constitution.

Stalin also noted that BJP's anxieties extend beyond Haryana, raising concerns over its recent Assembly election victories in Maharashtra. He criticised the Election Commission for yielding to pressures from Prime Minister Modi's Government, compromising its own integrity and the sanctity of free and fair elections.

He called on all political parties, including those allied with the Union Government, to unite against what he termed an "undemocratic assault" on the electoral process in the country. *—PTI*

Maha Kumbh: 50,000 cops to be deployed

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 will see a strong force of 50,000 police personnel fanning out across Prayagraj to respond to potential terror threats, cyber attacks, rogue drones and human trafficking, Uttar Pradesh Director General of Police, Prashant Kumar said on Monday. Held every 12 years, the Maha Kumbh will be organised in Prayagraj from 13 January to 26 February. About 45 crore pilgrims are expected at the Maha Kumbh. In an exclusive interview to PTI, the state DGP said he is personally overseeing measures for a safe and secure Kumbh. . Asked about the police deployment, Kumar said this time there will be around 50,000 policemen on duty which is 40 per cent more that that last Kumbh in 2019. —*PTI*

Delhi police to train teachers on bomb threats

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

With frequent hoax bomb threats triggering panic among school authorities, Delhi Police has decided to train teachers and school staff in dealing with such crises, an official said on Monday. Police will organise a seminar in collaboration with the Education Department for teachers of all government and private schools, he said. "We will teach how to stay calm, react and coordinate with police during a bomb threat in schools," said Deputy Commissioner of Police (Shahdara) Prashant Gautam. Multiple schools in Delhi have received hoax bomb threats in the last 10 days. The threats disrupted classes and triggered multi-agency search operations. —*PTI*

Goa-bound Vande Bharat diverted due to technical snag

MUMBAI, 23 DEC

CSMT-Madgaon Vande Bharat express train deviated from its regular route on Monday morning due to a technical snag at Diva station in Thane district of Maharashtra, delaying its onward journey to Goa by 90 minutes, officials said. Instead of proceeding towards Panvel station on the Diva-Panvel railway line used by Konkan-bound trains, the express train took the Kalyan route around 6.10am. This incident delayed Mumbai's local train services on the Central Railway. Central Railway chief PRO Swapnil Nila said the incident occurred due to the failure of the signalling and telecommunications system at point number 103, between the down fast line and the 5th line at Diva junction, from where trains heading towards Konkan proceed to Panvel station on the regular route. —*PTI*

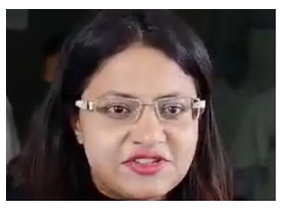


PHOTO: PTI

Puja Khedkar denied anticipatory bail in UPSC case

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

Delhi High Court on Monday refused to grant anticipatory bail to former IAS probationer Puja Khedkar in the criminal case lodged against her for alleged cheating and wrongly availing of OBC and disability quota benefits in the civil services examination. "Anticipatory bail plea is dismissed. Interim protection from arrest is vacated," Justice Chandra Dhari Singh said while ruling on the plea. Justice Singh said a strong prima facie case was made out against Khedkar and investigation was required to unearth the conspiracy. It was a classic case of fraud committed on a constitutional body as well as society, the judge said. Khedkar is accused of misrepresenting information in her application for the UPSC Civil Services Examination, 2022, to get reservation benefits. —*PTI*

Cops: Allu Arjun didn't leave theatre despite fan's death

Security stepped up at Arjun's home; BRS attacks Cong

HYDERABAD, 23 DEC

Top Telugu actor Allu Arjun did not leave the theatre during the screening of Pushpa-2 on 4 December despite being told to do so in view of a stampede in which a woman died, police officials said.

City police commissioner CV Anand on Sunday showed a video that suggests the actor remained in the theatre till the midnight.

About the sequence of events on the fateful night, a police official said he and other police officials informed a manager of Allu Arjun about the death of the woman and told him that the situation was out of control. Allu Arjun's staff members told them that they would convey the matter to the actor but did not do so, he said.

Protesters at the residence of Telugu actor Allu Arjun in Hyderabad

PHOTO: PTI

The official said he later managed to reach the actor, told him about the woman's death and asked him to leave the theatre so that the fans don't harm each other while trying to catch a glimpse of him. He also told the actor that security arrangements would be made for his exit.

However, the actor said he would go only after watching the film, the police official said. Later, the official went inside and brought the actor out, he said.

Meanwhile, a Hyderabad court on Monday morning granted bail to six students of Osmania University accused of vandalising Allu Arjun's residence in Jubilee Hills area of the city.

The police on Monday beefed up security at the residence of Telugu actor Allu Arjun here, a day after vandalism at the place, even as the opposition parties in Telangana attacked the ruling Congress over the incident. Meanwhile, BJP Lok Sabha member DK Aruna claimed that four of those who indulged in vandalism at the 42-year-old actor's house belong to Kodangal, the Assembly constituency of Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy. —*PTI/ANI*

PUNE HIT & RUN

Drunk driver kills 3 sleeping pedestrians

PUNE, 23 DEC

Two toddlers and a man were killed and six other persons injured after a truck ran over people sleeping on a footpath in Maharashtra's Pune city in the wee hours of Monday, police said.

The incident took place at 12.55 am on the footpath in Wagholi area where several people were sleeping, they said.

The victims comprised labourers and their family members hailing from Amravati. The labourers had come to Pune a couple of days back in search of jobs, the police said.

The truck driver, identified as Gajanan Totre, 26, was arrested after the incident and his medical test was being done to ascertain if he was driving under the influence of alcohol, an official said.

"There were many people sleeping on the footpath near Kesnand Phata area, most of them labourers. They were run over by a truck, leading to the death of three persons," a senior police official said.

The deceased have been identified as Vaibhavi Pawar, 1, Vaibhav Pawar,2, and Vishal Pawar ,22, the police said.

Pune Additional Commissioner of Police (East Region) Manoj Patil said the truck driver lost control over the wheels near Wagholi police station and rammed his vehicle into several people sleeping on the footpath at 12.55 am.

"We arrested the truck driver from the spot. We are also probing other facts of the accident. A case has been registered against the truck driver under all relevant sections. A medical test is underway to verify if he was drunk when the accident took place," the official said. —*PTI*

4 children killed as brick kiln wall collapses in Hisar

HISAR, 23 DEC

Four children were killed when a wall of a brick kiln collapsed on them while they were asleep in Budana village of Haryana's Hisar district, police said on Monday.

A girl was critically injured in the incident that took place on Sunday night in the Narnaund police station area. The deceased were identified as Nisha (3 months), Suraj, 9, Nandini, 5, and Vivek, 9, they said.

According to sources, many families of labourers from Uttar Pradesh work at the kiln in Budana. The work of making bricks and installing pillars near the chimney is going on at the kiln.

The children and some labourers were sleeping near the wall of the brick kiln when it collapsed on them.

While Suraj, Nandini and Vivek died on the spot, Nisha succumbed on the way to the hospital, said Superintendent of Police (SP), Hansi, Hemant Kumar Meena.

The children and some labourers were sleeping near the wall of the brick kiln when it collapsed on them

PHOTO: X

The condition of a five-year-old girl, Gauri, is critical. She is undergoing treatment at Hisar Civil Hospital. All five children hail from Badhav village in Ambedkar Nagar district of Uttar Pradesh, police said.

SP Meena visited Hisar Civil Hospital after the incident and met the families of the deceased.

The victims' families have not given any written complaint in the matter. If a complaint is received, action will be taken, he said. —*PTI*

Mumbai ferry crash caused by steering, throttle fault

MUMBAI, 23 DEC

The collision between a Navy boat and a passenger ferry off Mumbai's coast on 18 December, which resulted in 15 fatalities, is believed to have been caused by a technical malfunction in the boat's steering assembly and throttle quadrant, according to Navy sources. The Navy boat was reportedly traveling at high speed when it collided with the tourist ferry.

A survivor aboard the Navy vessel, who was associated with the boat's manufacturer and was present for testing before its induction, stated that the crew was aware of the malfunction at the time of the crash.

Videos of the incident show the crew attempting to steer the Navy boat away from the ferry, but it failed to turn sharply enough to prevent the collision.

The impact caused the ferry to sink in the Arabian Sea, marking one of the deadliest maritime accidents in Mumbai's harbor. Naval helicopters, boats, and Coast Guard vessels were deployed for search and rescue operations.

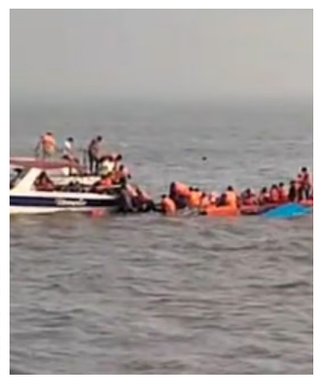


PHOTO: PTI

Records from the Maharashtra Maritime Board (MMB) reveal that the Neel Kamal ferry was licensed to carry a maximum of 84 passengers and six crew members, but it was overloaded at time of accident . —*Agencies*

Gangster abducting celebrities held in UP encounter

BIJNOR, 23 DEC

The Uttar Pradesh Police have arrested the mastermind of a gang involved in the abduction of actor Mushtaq Khan and comedian Sunil Pal on the pretext of inviting them for an event, officials said on Monday.

Lavi Pal alias Rahul Saini was arrested after an encounter on Sunday night, in which the accused was injured.

Bijnor Superintendent of Police Abhishek Jha said, "On 15 October, the accused, posing as Rahul Saini, invited film actor Mushtaq Khan for an event in Meerut on 20 November, offering Rs 25,000 as advance payment and a flight ticket.

The actor managed to escape from captivity a day later.

Jha said further investigations revealed that the gang used a similar modus operandi to target Pal also in Meerut. —*PTI*

MP tops stubble burning; NGT issues notice

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

National Green Tribunal has sought a response from pollution watchdog CAQM on Madhya Pradesh recording the highest stubble burning cases in the country.

The green body was hearing a matter in which it had taken suo motu cognisance of a media report about the state recording 11,382 stubble burning incidents, surpassing Punjab's 9,655.

The bench noted in the report that some farmers alleged burning paddy was a compulsion without alternative methods to remove the stubble.

It also noted that farmers of districts such as Betul and Balaghat had adopted sustainable practices to remove the stubble.

It impleaded as parties or respondents the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) director; the Bhopal regional office of the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change; and member-secretaries of the Central Pollution Control Board and the Madhya Pradesh Pollution Control Board.

The CAQM is an autonomous body tasked with improving the air quality in Delhi and its adjoining areas.

The matter has been posted before the tribunal's central zonal bench in Bhopal for further proceedings on 10 February. —*PTI*

HC: Wife's friends at hubby's home cruelty

KOLKATA, 23 DEC

The Calcutta High Court has granted a divorce decree to a husband on the grounds of cruelty, which includes "imposition" of the wife's friend and family on him and lodging of a false case of matrimonial cruelty by her.

The division bench of Justice Sabyasachi Bhattacharyya and Justice Uday Kumar on 19 December set aside the judgement of the trial court that refused a divorce decree in favour of the husband, terming it as perverse and erroneous.

The HC said a sufficiently strong case of mental cruelty has been made out by the husband. It said the continued presence of the woman friend and others of the wife's family at the official residential quarters of the husband at Kolaghat in East Midnapore district despite his objection and discomfort on such count is borne out by the records.

"Such imposition of friend and family of the respondent on the husband at his quarter against his will, sometimes even when the respondent-wife herself was not there, over a continuous period of time, can definitely be constituted as cruelty, since it might very well have made life impossible for the appellant, which would come within the broader purview of cruelty," the bench observed. —*PTI*

B'DESH OWES TRIPURA RS 200 CR POWER BILL

AGARTALA, 23 DEC

Bangladesh owes Tripura Rs 200 crore in electricity dues but no decision has been taken on halting power supply to the neighbouring country yet, Chief Minister Manik Saha said on Monday.

Tripura supplies 60–70 megawatts of power to the neighbouring country according to an agreement signed by the Tripura State Electricity Corporation Limited through the NTPC Vidyut Vyapar Nigam Limited with the Bangladesh Power Development Board.

"Bangladesh has not paid us about Rs 200 crore for supplying electricity. The outstanding (amount) is increasing every day. We hope that they will clear their dues, so that the power supply is not disrupted," Saha told PTI here in an interview.

Asked whether the Tripura government would stop the supply of electricity if Dhaka fails to pay the dues, the chief minister said no decision has been taken on it yet. —*PTI*

Cops bill farmer ₹9.9L for 'preventing' suicide

JAIPUR, 23 DEC

A farmer in Rajasthan's Jhunjhunu district has been asked to pay Rs 9.91 lakh for security arrangements made by police to prevent him from committing suicide after he had threatened to take the extreme step over non-payment of land compensation.

Vidhyadhar Yadav said he was distressed after his house was demolished for acquiring land for a cement plant in Gothada village in Nawalgarh in November without giving him compensation and that he never asked for the deployment of police force, for which he is being charged.

Yadav has now been given compensation of around Rs 3.8 crore.

But on 17 December, Superintendent of Police Jhunjhunu served a notice which says that 99 police personnel -- one Additional Superintendent of Police, two Deputy Superintendent of Police, two inspectors, three sub-inspectors, six assistant sub-inspectors, 18 head constables and 67 constables -- were deployed and government vehicles were used for his security, which put burden on exchequer.

PHOTO: X

It further said that the expenditure of Rs 9,91,577 incurred on his personal security has to be recovered from him.

The farmer said that he had no option but to demand euthanasia because all his land was acquired and the house was demolished without giving him compensation. —*PTI*

AFTER LAXMAN GANJ

Another ancient well discovered in Sambhal

SAMBHAL, 23 DEC

- The findings coincide with ongoing excavations in Sambhal after the reopening of the Bhasma Shankar Temple on 13 December, which had been closed for over 46 years

An ancient well closed for a long time with clean water was discovered at a site of religious faith in the Shahzadi Sarai area here, officials said on Monday.

An administration official said those involved in the management of the site are reviving the well, located in the city area.

"We have received information about the well-being found at Kshem Nath Tirtha and the people of Kshem Nath Tirtha are reviving it," Sambhal Sub-divisional Magistrate Vandana Mishra told PTI.

Mahant Bal Yogi Deenanath, the head priest of Kshema Nath Tirth, told reporters that the ancient well that was buried and closed off has been reopened.

"At approximately eight feet deep, we found water in it. The presence of clean water in this ancient structure is truly a divine blessing," he claimed.

The priest said the Kshema Nath Tirth, also known as Neemasar Tirth, is an auxiliary site of the prominent Naimisharanya Tirth, one of the 68 sacred pilgrimages in India, located in Sitapur district.

Local devotees expressed astonishment at the reopening of the ancient well, which had remained buried for several decades. A volunteer team, led by Mahant Deenanath, uncovered the well by breaking through an RCC (reinforced cement concrete) cover.

The ancient water source, which provided water to pilgrims performing parikrama in the past, was intact due to its depth.

The findings coincide with ongoing excavations in Sambhal after the reopening of the Bhasma Shankar Temple on 13 December, which had been closed for over 46 years. —*PTI*

A stepwell, approximately 125 to 150 years old and covering an area of 400 square metres, after it was unearthed during excavation at Chandausi area, in Sambhal district

PHOTO: PTI

UP Shiv temple reopens after 1992 Ayodhya riots

MUZAFFARNAGAR, 23 DEC

A Shiv temple in Ludhawala, a predominantly Muslim locality under the jurisdiction of Kotwali police station, was reopened on Monday with a 'havan' and Muslims showering flowers on a procession by Hindus.

The Shiv temple was built in 1971. However, during the communal tensions triggered by the Ayodhya incident in 1992, Hindu families from the locality migrated, taking the temple's idols and 'shivling' with them. Since then, the temple had remained closed.

In a remarkable display of harmony, local Muslims welcomed the procession of Hindu activists by showering flowers on them. —*PTI*

SHIMLA'S FRESH SNOWFALL

A fresh spell of snowfall has turned Shimla and Manali into winter wonderlands, drawing large numbers of tourists eager to experience the magic of snow
PHOTO: PTI

India urges UN reform as global conflicts escalate

India has been at the forefront of years-long efforts calling for reform of the Security Council, including expansion in both its permanent and non-permanent categories ***PHOTO: UN***

As the United Nations prepares to celebrate its 80th anniversary next year, India stressed that reform is "key" to the organisation's "relevance" in addressing current and future global challenges, as world leaders signed off on an ambitious pact in 2024 to transform global governance and drive sustainable action.

When world leaders descended at the UN Headquarters in September for the high-level 79th session of the General Assembly, they adopted by consensus the landmark 'Pact of the Future' - a document that covers themes from peace and security, sustainable development to climate change, digital cooperation, human rights, gender, youth and future generations, and transformation of global governance.

Underlining the need for reform, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said, "We don't need a crystal ball to see that 21st Century challenges require problem-solving mechanisms that are more effective, networked and inclusive. We can't create a future fit for our grandchildren with systems built for our grandparents."

India has been at the forefront of years-long efforts calling for reform of the Security Council, including expansion in both its permanent and non-permanent categories, saying the 15-nation Council, founded in 1945, is not fit for purpose in the 21st Century and does not reflect contemporary geo-political realities.

Delhi has underscored that it rightly deserves a permanent seat at the horse-shoe table.

A polarised Security Council has failed to deal with current peace and security challenges, with Council members sharply divided on conflicts such as the Ukraine war and the Israel-Hamas war.

Guterres noted that many of today's pressing issues were not foreseen when the UN's multilateral framework was created 80 years ago.

India's message to the international community was that reforms in global institutions are essential for global peace and development.

Modi's clarion call for change from the UNGA lectern came amid ongoing global conflicts, including the Ukraine war entering its third year, the Israel-Hamas war, and escalating global threats like terrorism, climate crises, economic inequality, and attacks on women's rights.

Amid these global challenges, India consistently advocated dialogue and diplomacy to arrive at solutions and resolve conflicts. When Modi met Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on the sidelines of the Summit of the Future before wrapping up his three-day visit to the US, he reiterated India's willingness to play a constructive role in the quest for a peaceful resolution of the conflict through dialogue and diplomacy.

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri emphasised Modi's commitment to finding a way forward and contributing in any way possible to a resolution of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

The Modi-Zelenskyy meeting was the third in about as many months. Modi met the Ukrainian leader in Kyiv in August, just weeks after he met Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow in July. In June, Modi held a bilateral meeting with Zelenskyy on the sidelines of the G7 Summit in Italy.

Modi held bilateral talks with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, expressing concern over the Gaza crisis and advocating a two-state solution for sustainable peace in the region.

Modi also met Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on the sidelines of the 16th BRICS summit in Kazan, Russia in October amidst heightened tensions between Iran and Israel. Modi emphasized the need for dialogue and diplomacy to de-escalate tensions in the volatile region.

Terrorism continued to pose a significant threat to peace and security globally in 2024.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's General Assembly address in September marked a strong stance, explicitly condemning Pakistan's "cross-border terrorism policy"for the first time in six years from the UNGA lectern while delivering the national statement at the high-level General Debate.

The UN's ability to maintain peace and security remains under scrutiny as its Security Council grapples with polarisation and fails to maintain international peace and security.

Pakistan, which has an "all-weather ally" in China, is set to sit at the Security Council horse-shoe table for a two-year term as an elected non-permanent member beginning January 1, 2025.

India's strong call for change resonates globally as the UN nears its 80th year, striving to remain relevant in a rapidly evolving world.

The world body also faces its litany of uncertainties with Donald Trump's return to the US President in 2025.

Known for his criticisms of the UN, Trump's first term from 2017-2021 saw the US withdraw from several UN agencies, including the Paris Climate Agreement, the UN Human Rights Council and UNESCO, and cut funding to the United Nations Population Fund, the organisation's reproductive health agency.

Following Trump's election victory, Guterres reaffirmed the importance of US-UN cooperation, expressing readiness to engage constructively with the incoming administration.

In his first term, Trump described the UN as hampered by "bureaucracy and mismanagement", calling for reforms to advance its mission.

All eyes will be on how the relationship between the UN and the incoming Trump administration pans out given his past criticisms of the world body. *—PTI*

SALAR ساہر

Bethlehem marks somber X-mas amid Gaza war

The Nativity Store in Manger Square has sold handmade olive wood carvings and religious items to people visiting the traditional birthplace of Jesus since 1927. But as Bethlehem prepares to mark its second Christmas under the shadow of the war in Gaza, there are almost no tourists, leaving the Nativity Store and other businesses unsure of how much longer they hold on.

For the second straight year, Bethlehem's Christmas celebrations will be somber and muted, in deference to ongoing war in Gaza. There will be no giant Christmas tree in Manger Square, no raucous scout marching bands, no public lights twinkling and very few public decorations or displays.

"Last year before Christmas, we had more hope, but now again we are close to Christmas and we don't have anything," said Rony Tabash, the third-generation owner of Nativity Store.

Israel's war against Hamas has been raging for nearly 15 months, and there still is no end in sight. Repeated ceasefire efforts have stalled.

Since the war began, tourism to Israel and the Israeli-occupied West Bank has plummeted. And after Israel barred entry to most of the 150,000 Palestinians in the West Bank who had jobs in Israel, the Palestinian economy contracted by 25 per cent in the past year.

The yearly Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem — shared among Armenian, Catholic and Orthodox denominations — are usually major boons for the city, where tourism accounts for 70 per cent of its yearly income. But the streets are empty this season.

Tabash said he continues to open the store every day, but often an entire week will go by without a sale. Tabash works with more than 25 local families who create hand-carved religious items out of the region's storied olive wood. But with no buyers, work has dried up for these families.

Lots of room at the inn

The number of visitors to the city plunged from a pre-Covid high of around 2 million visitors per year in 2019 to fewer than 100,000 visitors in 2024, said Jiries Qumsiyeh, the spokesperson for the Palestinian tourism ministry.

According to the Christmas story, Mary was forced to give birth to Jesus in a stable because there was no room at the inn. Today, nearly all of Bethlehem's 5,500 hotel rooms are empty.

The city's hotel occupancy rate plunged from around 80 per cent in early 2023 to around 3 per cent today, said Elias Al Arja, the head of Bethlehem Hoteliers Association. At his own hotel, the Bethlehem Hotel, he said he has laid off a staff of more than 120 people and retains just five employees.

The city hosts more than 100 stores and 450 workshops dealing with traditional Palestinian handicraft, Qumsiyeh said. But just a week before Christmas, when the city should be bursting with visitors, Manger Square was mostly empty save for a few locals selling coffee and tea. Only two of the eight stores in the main drag of the square were open for business.

Qumsiyeh worries that when the war ends and tourism eventually rebounds, many of the families that have handed down traditional skills for generations will no longer be making the items that reflect Palestinian heritage and culture.

A Christmas without joy

Almost 500 families have left Bethlehem in the past year, said Mayor Anton Salman. And those are just the families who moved abroad with official residency visas. Many others have moved abroad on temporary tourist visas and are working illegally, and it's unclear if they will return, Salman said.

Around half of the population in the Bethlehem area, including nearby villages, works in either tourism or in jobs in Israel.

Canceling Christmas festivities is one way to draw attention to the difficult situation in Bethlehem and across the Palestinian territories, said Salman. "This year we want to show the world that the Palestinian people are still suffering and they haven't the joy that everybody else in the world having," said Salman.

Christians are a small percentage of the population. There are about 182,000 in Israel, 50,000 in the West Bank and Jerusalem and 1,300 in Gaza, according to the US State Department.

Some families are finding ways to bring back pockets of joy. *—PTI*

As Bethlehem prepares to mark its second Christmas under the shadow of the war in Gaza, there are almost no tourists and other businesses unsure of how much longer they can hold on ***PHOTO: AP***

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Rafi@100: Shahid remembers dad who chose carrom over film parties

Lunch, a Coke and then to the studio. Other singers may have worried about a sore throat but not his father, the "god gifted" Mohammed Rafi, a man of simple tastes who didn't like socialising and preferred a game of carom with his children over film parties, recalls his son Shahid Rafi.

Mohammed Rafi, the man behind the velvety voice that playbacked for screen legends down the generations, right from Dilip Kumar and Shammi Kapoor to Amitabh Bachchan and Rishi Kapoor, would have been 100 on 24 December. With a legacy of more than 5,000 songs, Rafi was the music legend extraordinaire.

For his family though, he remained the simple, soft spoken person who opted for a quieter life away from the glitz of Bollywood.

"He was a great singer, his voice was different. It was velvety. He was an excellent human being and a father. He was very soft spoken… whenever my dad would speak, we had to listen carefully. He would tease us saying, 'Can't you hear me, are you deaf'?" Shahid told PTI in an interview.

"All of us (children) saw Rafi sahab as a father. We respected him as a father and not as a singer. My father would often tell us, 'I'm not Mohammed Rafi, I'm your father'," he said.

The 63-year-old, who is also a singer and performs in stage shows, is the youngest of Rafi's seven children.

The singer behind evergreen hits such as "Abhi na jaao chhod kar" and "Aaja, aaja" was not someone for birthday celebrations and it was left to his family to bring in the cake.

Rafi died in 1980 of a sudden heart attack. He was just 55.

Shahid remembers his father as someone who was a foodie but not very picky in his choices.

Rafi, who could not study beyond Class 4, was a lenient father. But he was the strict disciplinarian was when it came to his children's education.

His father would sometimes do his 'riyaaz' in Chowpatty.

"We were told by my mother that dad was staying in a chawl in Bhendi Bazaar when he first came to Mumbai. People would get disturbed when he was doing his 'riyaaz' so he would go walking to Chowpatty and practise on his tanpura and harmonium at the beach."

Though he sung thousands of film songs, many of them still etched in the hearts and minds of people across generations, Rafi would rarely watch movies.

With a legacy of more than 5,000 songs, Rafi was the music legend extraordinaire. For his family though, he remained the simple, soft spoken person who opted for a quieter life away from Bollywood ***PHOTO: X***

"We would go to the theatres maybe once or twice a year. We had a projector in our house and whenever he felt like watching any film, we would all watch it together," Shahid said.

According to him, Rafi was close friends with screen icon Dilip Kumar, for whom he sung the memorable "Madhuban Mein Radhika Naache Re" and "Ude Jab Jab Zulfein Teri", music composer Naushad and lyricist Shakeel Badayuni.

"They had their own group. They would go to play badminton early morning at 6 am at Bandra gym. He was very fond of playing badminton with his group. He stopped playing badminton after he sprained his leg, he was diabetic," Shahid said.

Rafi also had a great equation with actor Johnny Walker (remember "Sar Jo Tera Chakraye") for whom he sang about 100 songs, producer Gaffar Nadiawala and screenwriter Salim Khan, the son said.

Rafi was born on 24 December, 1924, to Allah Rakhi and Haji Ali Mohammad in a Punjabi Jat Muslim family in Kotla Sultan Singh, a village near Amritsar. He was the second of six brothers. The family moved to Lahore. From there, Rafi travelled to Bombay to make a career in playback singing.

"He was a very charitable person, he took care of so many people in terms of their education or got them married. Dad never said no to anyone.

"During Eid, many delicacies were made at home and so many people would come including family, friends, colleagues from the industry. They would come especially to have 'sheer khurma'. My mother would cook everything at home," he added.

According to Shahid, Rafi never found any song difficult.

"He would himself say, 'Meri koi aukaat nahi, yeh toh sab upar wala karwa raha hai, yeh allah ki den hai' (I am not at all capable, it's all because of god and his blessings)."

Asked whether Rafi ever disclosed his favourites amongst the many songs he sang in his four-decade career, Shahid said the singer never identified any but there are some he can guess.

"When I toured with him in 1979 in America, Europe and Cananda, there were three songs which I feel he loved very much because in every show he would sing these songs, which are, 'O Duniya Ke Rakhwale' (from 'Baiju Bawra'), 'Suhani Raat Dhal Chuki' (from 'Dulari'), and 'Madhuban Mein Radhika Nache Re' (from 'Kohinoor'), irrespective of whether people would request him to sing these songs or not," he said.

Shahid has announced a biopic on his father. It will be directed by Umesh Shukla of "OMG: Oh My God" fame.

He is expected to announce the actor who will play Rafi in the biopic on the musician's 100th birthday on 24 December. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

174 Colorado skiers rescued after lift develops cracks

WINTER PARK, 23 DEC

Officials were investigating Sunday what caused a crack in a Colorado ski lift that forced the evacuation of over 170 stranded skiers and snowboarders. The gondola lift at Winter Park Resort, about 113kms west of Denver, automatically stopped when it detected the crack in a structural piece of the lift just after noon on Saturday, resort spokesperson Jen Miller said. People riding in the gondolas were lowered down by ropes. No injuries were reported during the rescues. Workers replaced the section of the lift that cracked Sunday. *—PTI*

Pak forces gun down 11 suspected terrorists

PESHAWAR, 23 DEC

The security forces gunned down 11 suspected terrorists, including a commander of the banned Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), in two intelligence-based operations in the restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on Sunday. The operations were conducted in the volatile Tirah Valley in Khyber district and Lakki Marwat district after reports about the presence of militants. A group of militants was moving through the Tirah Valley via Pir Mela when they were intercepted by the security forces. In the subsequent firing, 10 militants were killed while four others were injured. Among the militants killed was a commander who was leading the group, sources said. The slain militants belonged to the banned extremist organisation's Hafiz Gul Bahadur group. Separately in Lakki Marwat district, police and the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) conducted a joint intelligence-based operation in the Shagai area. *—PTI*

Australia okays extradition of ex-US Marine pilot

NEWCASTLE, 23 DEC

Former US Marine Corps pilot Daniel Duggan will be extradited from Australia to the United States over allegations that he illegally trained Chinese aviators. Australia's Attorney General Mark Dreyfus approved the extradition on Monday, ending the Boston-born 55-year-old's nearly two-year attempt to avoid being returned to the US. Duggan, who served in the Marines for 12 years before immigrating to Australia and giving up his US citizenship, has been in a maximum-security prison since he was arrested in 2022 at his family home in the state of New South Wales. He is the father of six children. Dreyfus confirmed in a statement on Monday he had approved the extradition but did not say when Duggan would be transferred to the US. *—PTI*

SL ends military security for former presidents

COLOMBO, 23 DEC

Military personnel engaged to provide security to former Sri Lankan presidents have been withdrawn with effect from Monday evening, the Defence Ministry sources said. From now, only police would be attached to the personal protection divisions of former presidents.
Last week, the parliament was told that slashing excessive personal security provided to former presidents would lead to saving of Sri Lankan Rs 1,200 million annually.
The opposition Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), which Mahinda Rajapaksa heads, claimed that slashing the security of the former president would endanger his safety. Under the new arrangement, all former presidents would be provided just 60 police personnel each as recommended by the committee. *—PTI*

Chennai born Sriram is US AI policy advisor

The Indian-American will help shape AI policies and ensure continued American leadership

WASHINGTON DC, 23 DEC

US president-elect Donald Trump named Indian American entrepreneur, venture capitalist and author Sriram Krishnan as Senior White House Policy Advisor on Artificial Intelligence.

Sriram Krishnan will serve as the Senior Policy Advisor for Artificial Intelligence at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, Trump said on Sunday as he announced a number of appointments on artificial intelligence or AI.

Krishnan, who has previously led product teams at Microsoft, Twitter, Yahoo!, Facebook and Snap, will work along with David O. Sacks who will be the White House AI & Crypto Czar.

Working closely with David Sacks, Sriram will focus on ensuring continued American leadership in AI and help shape and coordinate AI policy across government, including working with the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology. Sriram started his career at Microsoft as a founding member of Windows Azure, Trump said.

Sriram Krishnan PHOTO: PTI

Krishnan said, I'm honoured to be able to serve our country and ensure continued American leadership in AI working closely with David Sacks.

Krishnan's appointment has been welcomed by the Indian American community.

We heartily congratulate Sriram Krishnan and are delighted that he has been appointed by President-elect Donald Trump as Senior Policy Advisor in the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, said Indian diaspora's executive director Sanjeev Joshipura.

- Krishnan, who previously led product teams at Microsoft, X, Yahoo!, Facebook and Snap, will work along with David O Sacks who will be the White House AI & Crypto Cza

For several years, Sriram has been an insightful thinker and influential commentator in the artificial intelligence realm. His previous work blending public policy, international affairs, investing and technology will stand him in good stead as he serves the nation in this important role, he added.

As Indian diaspora continues our convening and thought leadership work on AI in the United States and abroad, we look forward to engaging closely with Sriram, Joshipura said. *—PTI*

MUSK CAN'T BE PREZ AS HE IS NOT BORN IN US: TRUMP

WASHINGTON DC, 23 DEC

US President-elect Donald Trump dismissed rumours suggesting that billionaire Elon Musk could assume the presidency, stating "it was not happening" and referring to the constitutional requirement that a president must be born in the country.

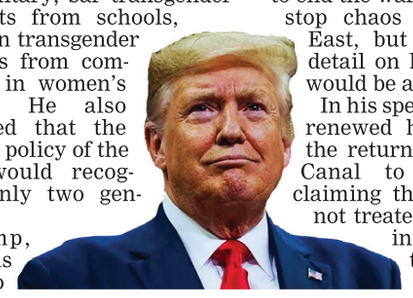
According to NBC News, Musk, who is born in South Africa, has been selected by Trump to lead the Department of Government Efficiency a body aimed at significantly reducing government spending, regulations, and the federal workforce.

Trump's comments came in response to criticism from Democrats, who have mockingly referred to Musk as "President Musk" due to his influence in the incoming administration. *—Agencies*

Trump vows to end transgender 'lunacy'

ARIZONA, 23 DEC

President-elect Donald Trump promised to take immediate action on several controversial issues during his first day in office. Speaking at the AmericaFest conference in Phoenix, Arizona, Trump vowed to "stop the transgender lunacy" by signing executive orders that would remove transgender individuals from the military, bar transgender students from schools, and ban transgender athletes from competing in women's sports. He also declared that the official policy of the U.S. would recognize only two genders.



Trump, who is set to take office with Republicans controlling both chambers of Congress and the White House, also vowed to take action against "migrant crime" and promised to designate drug cartels as foreign terrorist organizations. He reiterated his commitment to deportations, calling for the "largest deportation operation in American history." Additionally, Trump pledged to end the war in Ukraine and stop chaos in the Middle East, but provided little detail on how these goals would be achieved.

In his speech, Trump also renewed his demand for the return of the Panama Canal to U.S. control, claiming that Panama had not treated the U.S. fairly in its operation of the waterway. *—Agencies*

SEEKS END TO WAR

Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow, Russia PHOTO: PTI

Slovak PM meets Putin in surprise visit

MOSCOW, 23 DEC

Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico made a surprise visit to Moscow, where he held one-on-one talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin, the Kremlin confirmed. Fico, critical of the European Union's support for Ukraine, discussed a peaceful resolution to the war, emphasizing that he believes there is no military solution to the conflict.

Fico said on Facebook after the meeting that top EU officials were informed of his trip, the third by an EU leader since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022.

Previous visits by Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer in April 2022 and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban last July faced criticism from EU allies.

The Slovak leader said the trip came in response to talks last week with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who, according to the Slovak leader, had expressed opposition to any gas transit through Ukraine to Slovakia. At a summit in Brussels Zelenskyy told EU leaders that Kyiv has no intention of renewing the deal, something Fico insisted will-harm his country's interests.

- Russian natural gas still flows to some European countries, including Slovakia, through Ukraine under an agreement signed before the war

Russian natural gas still flows to some European countries, including Slovakia, through Ukraine under a five-year agreement signed before the war that is due to expire at the end of this year.

Last month, Slovakia signed a short-term pilot contract to buy natural gas from Azerbaijan, as it prepares for a possible halt to Russian supplies through Ukraine. Earlier this year, it struck a deal to import United States liquefied natural gas through a pipeline from Poland.

Fico stopped military aid to Ukraine after coming to power in 2023, as he shifted Slovakia's foreign policy. He has also critcised Western sanctions against Moscow. Slovak opposition politicians have called his visit to Moscow a "disgrace". *—Agencies*

Israeli airstrikes kill 20 in Gaza

JERUSALEM/ BEIRUT 23 DEC

Palestinian medics say Israeli airstrikes on the Gaza Strip have killed at least 20 people.

One of the strikes overnight and into Monday hit a tent camp in the Muwasi area, an Israel-declared humanitarian zone, killing eight people, including two children. That's according to the Nasser Hospital in the southern city of Khan Younis, which received the bodies.

Hospital records show another six killed in a strike on people securing an aid convoy and another two killed in a strike on a car in Muwasi. One person was killed in a separate strike in the area.

The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in the central city of Deir al-Balah said three bodies arrived after an airstrike on a school-turned-shelter in the built-up Nuseirat refugee camp.

The Israeli military says it only strikes militants, accusing them of hiding among civilians.

The Israeli military says it only strikes militants, accusing them of hiding among civilians PHOTO: PTI

Israel's air and ground offensive has killed over 45,200 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. The ministry says women and children make up more than half the dead but does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its tally. The military says it has killed over 17,000 militants, without providing evidence.

Meanwhile, Lebanon's caretaker prime minister has begun a tour of military positions in the country's south, almost a month after a ceasefire deal that ended the war between Israel and the Hezbollah group that battered the country. *—PTI*

Ex-Israeli spies detail attack on Hezbollah

WASHINGTON, 23 DEC

Two recently retired senior Israeli intelligence agents disclosed details of a covert operation targeting Hezbollah militants in Lebanon and Syria, which involved the use of explosive pagers and walkie-talkies deployed three months ago.

The operation, initiated a decade ago, involved embedding explosives in walkie-talkies that Hezbollah unknowingly purchased from Israel. The second phase commenced in 2022 when Mossad identified Hezbollah's acquisition of pagers from a Taiwan-based firm. Agents manipulated marketing tactics to convince Hezbollah to adopt these explosive devices.

On 17 September, the pagers detonated across Lebanon, followed by explosions at funerals, resulting in approximately 30 deaths. *—PTI*

New York police arrests suspect in subway car fire

NEW YORK, 23 DEC

New York City Police have detained a "person of interest" following the tragic early morning death of a woman who allegedly fell asleep on a stationary subway train, only to be deliberately set on fire by an unknown man. The suspect was apprehended after three school students recognised him from surveillance footage shared by authorities.

Police Commissioner Jessica Tisch described the incident as "one of the most depraved crimes one person could possibly commit against another human being." The pair, whose identities have not been disclosed, were travelling together on a Brooklyn subway line when the suspect approached her and ignited her with a lighter. Witnesses reported that the flames engulfed her in seconds.

Unbeknownst to them, the suspect remained nearby on a bench. Body camera footage of him was circulated, leading to a 911 tip-off from the teenagers. *—PTI*

HAPPINESS AMID RUBBLES

A Christmas tree stands amid the ruins of St. George Melkite Catholic Church in southern Lebanon, destroyed by an Israeli airstrike in October PHOTO: X

Luigi pleads not guilty to murder, terror charges

NEW YORK, 23 DEC

The man accused of killing UnitedHealthcare's CEO pleaded not guilty on Monday to murder and terror charges while his attorney complained that statements coming from New York's mayor would make it tough for him to receive a fair trial.

The Manhattan district attorney charged Luigi Mangione, 26, last week with multiple counts of murder, including murder as an act of terrorism, in a state case that will run parallel to his federal prosecution.

The charges could carry the possibility of the death penalty, while the maximum sentence for the state charges is life in prison without parole.

Prosecutors have said the two cases will proceed on parallel tracks, with the state charges expected to go to trial first. One of Mangione's attorneys told the judge that government officials, including New York Mayor Eric Adams, have turned Mangione into a political pawn, robbing him of his rights as a defendant and tainting the jury pool. *—PTI*

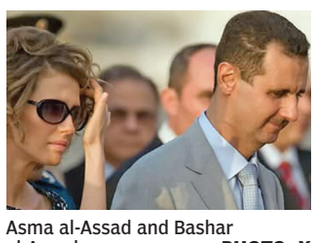
ASSAD'S DOWNFALL CONTINUES

Assad's wife seeks divorce, wants to return to UK

DAMASCUS, 23 DEC

Asma al-Assad, wife of deposed Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, has reportedly filed for divorce and expressed a desire to return to the United Kingdom. According to The Jerusalem Post, citing Turkish and Arab media, Asma is dissatisfied with life in Moscow, where the Assad's have been in exile. She has allegedly applied for permission to leave Russia, and her request is currently under review by Russian authorities.

Born in London in 1975 to Syrian parents, Asma holds dual British-Syrian citizenship. She studied computer science and French literature at King's College London before working in investment banking. She married Assad in December 2000, and the couple has three children. Asma has reportedly sought to relocate to London with her children since the Syrian uprising began.



Asma al-Assad and Bashar al-Assad PHOTO: X

Assad, now in Moscow under asylum, faces severe restrictions, including being prohibited from leaving the city or engaging in political activities. His assets, including 270 kg of gold, USD 2 billion in cash, and 18 properties in Moscow, have been frozen by Russian authorities.

The Assad dynasty, which ruled Syria for over five decades, crumbled after rebel forces breached Damascus, forcing Bashar to flee. Assad's inner circle included his brother and cousin Rami Makhlouf, Syria's wealthiest businessman. *—Agencies*

TikTok ban not a rushed reaction: Albanian PM

TIRANA, 23 DEC

Albania's Prime Minister Edi Rama announced on Saturday a one-year ban on the social media platform TikTok, citing concerns over incitement to violence and bullying, particularly among children. This decision follows a series of community consultations with teachers and parents, spurred by the stabbing death of a teenager in November, which was linked to a quarrel that began on social media.

TikTok said they found no evidence connecting the involved parties to their platform. *—PTI*

US lawmakers seek ban on Chinese-made drones

WASHINGTON, 23 DEC

PHOTO: X

Russell Hedrick, a North Carolina farmer, relies on Chinese-made drones to efficiently spray fertilizers on his crops, significantly reducing costs compared to traditional ground sprayers. As a volunteer rescuer, he also employs thermal drones to locate individuals trapped by mudslides and delivers supplies to those in distress. However, with increasing scrutiny and proposed bans on Chinese drones by US lawmakers, Hedrick fears he may soon have to ground his fleet.

Restrictions are focused on concerns, with a defence bill passed on 18 December potentially prohibiting new drone sales from select Chinese companies. Theyargue that reliance on Chinese drones poses strategic risks, prompting calls for an increase in domestic production.

Many operators are concerned about the repercussions of a wider ban, as alternatives to Chinese brands like DJI are costly. For instance, the Kingsport Fire Department faced costs when sourcing non-Chinese drones, and forensic experts in Texas worry their critical investigations could come to a halt. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Rupee falls 7 paise to close at 85.11 against USD

MUMBAI, 23 DEC

The rupee failed to resist pressure from strengthening American currency and lost 7 paise to settle at 85.11 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday despite a sharp recovery in domestic equities. According to forex traders, the rupee stayed weak due to significant dollar demand. Moreover, higher crude oil prices triggered by volatile geopolitical situation also dented sentiments. They said the dollar index is expected to remain elevated as the US Federal Reserve indicated slower-than-expected rate cut in 2025. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 85.02 and touched the lowest level of 85.13 (provisional) against the greenback before ending the session at 85.11 (provisional) against the greenback. *—PTI*

Gold climbs ₹570 to ₹78,700 per 10g

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

Gold prices recovered Rs 570 to Rs 78,700 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday amid value buying by stockists and investors following a firm global trend, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal ended at Rs 78,130 per 10 grams on Friday. Silver surged Rs 1,850 to reclaim the Rs 90,000 per kg-mark on increased offtake by industrial units and coin makers. The white metal finished at Rs 88,150 per kg in the previous trading session. The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity also jumped Rs 570 to Rs 78,300 per 10 grams on Monday. *—PTI*

PVR INOX appoints Shalu Sabharwal as Head

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

Cinema exhibitor PVR INOX Ltd on Monday announced a restructuring of its Rs 600 crore media business, naming Chief Sales Officer Shalu Sabharwal as the leader of initiatives to focus on deepening market connections and driving growth across the country. Sabharwal will take the lead in making strategic changes to bolster media business by leveraging a team of industry experts who will take charge of business development across India, PVR INOX said in a statement."Her extensive experience and strategic vision make her the ideal leader to guide this transformation. By bringing in industry experts and focusing on key areas like data-driven decision-making and sponsorship opportunities, we are positioning PVR INOX as a dominant force in the media business," PVR INOX CEO-Revenue & Operations, Gautam Dutta said. *—PTI*

GSP Crop Science files papers to raise funds via IPO

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

Agrochemical Company, GSP Crop Science Ltd, has filed preliminary papers with the capital markets regulator Sebi to raise funds through an Initial Public Offering (IPO). The Ahmedabad-based company's IPO is a mix of fresh issue of shares worth Rs 280 crore and an Offer For Sale (OFS) of 60 lakh equity shares by promoters, according to the Draft Red Herring prospectus (DRHP). The offer also includes a reservation for a subscription by employees. The company may consider raising Rs 56 crore as pre-IPO placement. If such placement is completed, the fresh issue size will be reduced. As per the draft papers filed on Friday, proceeds from the fresh issue to the tune of Rs 200 crore will be used for payment of debt and and a portion will be utilised for general corporate purposes. *—PTI*

After merger, Nissan-Honda to be 3rd largest automaker

It aims to achieve combined annual sales of 30Trillion yen

TOKYO, 23 DEC

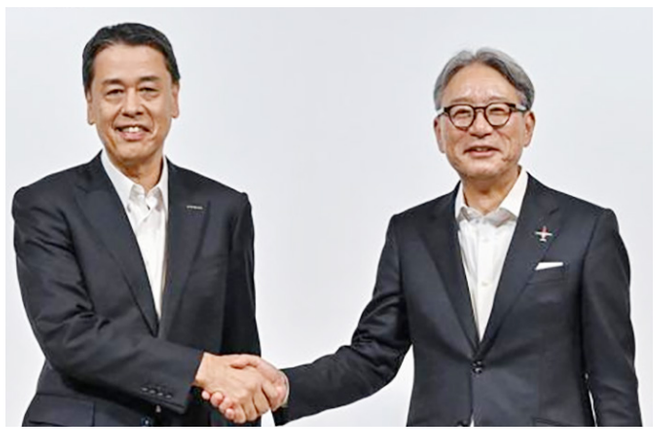
Japanese automakers Honda and Nissan have announced plans to join forces, forming world's third-largest automaker by sales as the industry undergoes dramatic changes in its transition away from fossil fuels.

The two companies said they had signed a memorandum of understanding on Monday and that smaller Nissan alliance member Mitsubishi Motors also had agreed to join the talks on integrating their businesses.

The merger aims to achieve combined annual sales of 30 trillion yen and an operating profit exceeding 3 trillion yen.

"We anticipate that if this integration comes to fruition, we will be able to deliver even greater value to a wider customer base," Nissan's CEO Makoto Uchida said in a statement.

Automakers in Japan have lagged behind their big rivals in electric vehicles and are trying to cut costs and make up for lost time.



The two companies signed a MoU and said that Mitsubishi Motors also had agreed to join the talks on integrating their businesses *PHOTO: X*

News of a possible merger surfaced earlier this month, with unconfirmed reports saying that the talks on closer collaboration partly were driven by aspirations of Taiwan iPhone maker Foxconn to tie up with Nissan, which has an alliance with Renault SA of France and Mitsubishi.

A merger could result in a behemoth worth more than USD50 billion based on the market capitalisation of all three automakers. Together, Honda and the Nissan alliance with Renault SA of France and smaller automaker Mitsubishi Motors Corp would gain scale to compete with Toyota Motor Corp and with Germany's Volkswagen AG. Toyota has technology partnerships with Japan's Mazda Motor Corp. and Subaru Corp. Nissan, Honda and Mitsubishi announced in August that they would share components for electric vehicles like batteries and jointly research software for autonomous driving to adapt better to dramatic changes centred around electrification, following a preliminary agreement between Nissan and Honda set in March.

Honda, Japan's second-largest automaker, is widely viewed as the only likely Japanese partner able to affect a rescue of Nissan, which has struggled following a scandal that began with the arrest of its former chairman Carlos Ghosn in late 2018 on charges of fraud and misuse of company assets, allegations that he denies. He eventually was released on bail and fled to Lebanon. *—PTI*

NIFTY UP 165 POINTS

Mkt recovers after five days, Sensex climbs 500 points

MUMBAI, 23 DEC

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded sharply on Monday after five days of steep decline amid value buying at lower levels and a supportive trend in global markets.

Besides, bargain hunting in blue chip stocks like ITC, HDFC Bank and Reliance Industries added to the optimism in the equity market, traders said.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex jumped 498.58 points or 0.64 per cent to settle at 78,540.17. During the day, it soared 876.53 points or 1.12 per cent to 78,918.12.

The NSE Nifty surged 165.95 points or 0.70 per cent to 23,753.45.

"The Indian market demonstrated optimism following the recent sell-off. The lower-than-expected US PCE print bolstered investor sentiment in interest rate-sensitive sectors. Broad-based buying was observed, with the metals sector notably benefiting from the anticipated increase in steel import taxes.

"Despite the positive market sentiment, the short-term outlook is expected to remain sideways due to a lack of new catalysts and the impact of the festive season and holidays," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

From the 30 blue-chip stocks, ITC, Tech Mahindra, HDFC Bank, Reliance Industries, IndusInd Bank, Titan, State Bank of India and ICICI Bank were the biggest gainers.

New entrant Zomato, Maruti, Nestle, HCL Tech, Bajaj Finserv and Tata Motors were among the laggards.

The BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.10 per cent, while smallcap index declined 0.60 per cent. *—PTI*

SEBI suspends Bharat Global Developers trading

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) announced the suspension of trading in Bharat Global Developers Ltd (BGDL) due to serious allegations of financial misrepresentation, misleading disclosures, and price manipulation.

The interim order has led to a ban on BGDL and its top executives, including Managing Director Ashok Kumar Sewada and CEO Mohsin Shaikh, along with directors Dinesh Kumar Sharma and Nirali Prabhatbhai Karetha. Additionally, various preferential allottees among 18 implicated entities have also been barred from the securities market. Sebi has frozen illegal profits amounting to Rs 271.6 crore gained through share sales.

The investigation was triggered by a remarkable 105-fold surge in BGDL's share price, which skyrocketed from Rs 16.14 in November 2023 to Rs 1,702.95 in November 2024, following social media scrutiny and a complaint lodged on 16 December 2024. Sebi's inquiries revealed that the company had engaged in deceptive practices, including false claims about business expansion and misleading financial statements, which failed to reflect the company's actual performance.

SEBI suspended the trading after allegations of financial misrepresentation, misleading disclosures, and price manipulation *PHOTO: ANI*

Prior to the share manipulation, BGDL had reported negligible revenues and assets. The company's portrayal as a successful entity was deemed a façade to attract unaware investors, inflating its market capitalisation to over Rs 12,000 crore without any genuine economic basis. *—PTI*

The soaring input costs and significant food inflation slowed urban market growth in the latter half of 2024 for fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry *PHOTO: X*

FMCG sector expects consumption revival

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

The fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry is optimistic about a resurgence in consumption growth by 2025, following a difficult year marked by soaring input costs and significant food inflation that slowed urban market growth in the latter half of 2024.

Key commodities such as palm oil, coffee, cocoa, and wheat have seen price hikes, prompting FMCG companies to increase product prices by 3 to 5 per cent or introduce shrinkflation strategies—reducing pack sizes to maintain price competitiveness and avoid volume losses.

Industry leaders are hopeful that the upcoming annual budget will bolster the stressed middle-income group and stimulate consumption, aided by a good monsoon and rural market recovery. Emami's Vice Chairman, Harsha V Agarwal, noted that easing food inflation is a positive sign, while rural demand outpaces urban growth.

Executives from companies like Dabur and Tata Consumer Products expressed optimism for growth driven by premiumisation, where consumers are willing to pay more for higher quality. They also highlighted the potential of Gen Z and millennials, expected to account for 76 per cent of consumption by 2030.

Despite ongoing challenges, including inflation and rising costs, industry leaders emphasised the importance of innovation and affordability as critical growth drivers. *—PTI*

Adani to buy aviation services firm Air Works for ₹400 crore

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

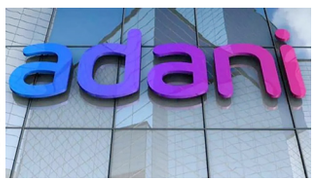


PHOTO:X

Adani Group on Monday said it will acquire aviation maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) services firm Air Works for an enterprise value of Rs 400 crore.

"Adani Defence Systems & Technologies Ltd (ADSTL) has signed a share purchase agreement to acquire 85.8 per cent shareholding in Air Works, India's largest private sector MRO company with the largest pan-India footprint," the conglomerate said in a statement.

With operations spanning 35 cities and a workforce of over 1,300 personnel, Air Works brings extensive expertise in servicing both fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircraft.

The acquisition enhances Adani's capabilities in the defence MRO sector, solidifying its position in India's airborne defence ecosystem. This strategic move marks a pivotal step in Adani's growth trajectory, laying the foundation for its expansion into the civil aviation services domain.

Air Works offers an end-to-end bouquet of aviation services spanning line maintenance, heavy checks, interior refurbishment, painting, redelivery checks, avionics as well as asset management services to its Indian and global customers. It undertakes base maintenance for narrowbody and turboprop aircraft, as well as rotary aircraft from its facilities at Hosur, Mumbai, and Kochi and with regulatory approvals from civil aviation authorities of more than 20 countries. *—PTI*

CRISIL: India's data centre capacity to more than double by FY27

MUMBAI, 23 DEC

PHOTO:PIXABAY

India's data centre capacity is set to more than double to 2-2.3 GW by 2026-27, led by increasing digitalisation as organisations increase their investments in cloud storage, Crisil Ratings said in a report on Monday.

Further, the report stated that rising penetration of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) will drive the demand over the medium-term.

To support the strong demand, the incremental capital expenditure would be supported by a higher proportion of debt funding, which will result in a moderate increase in debt levels, it said.

Data centres cater to the computing and storage infrastructure demand as enterprises rapidly shifting their businesses to digital platforms, including cloud, a trend that has accelerated post Covid-19 pandemic, it said.

The other major factor is that increased accessibility of high-speed data has led to a surge in internet usage, including social media, over-the-top (OTT) platforms and digital payments, it added.

Notably, mobile data traffic logged a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 25 per cent over the last five fiscals, standing at 24 GB per month at end-fiscal 2024, and is expected to rise to 33-35 GB by FY26, the Crisil Ratings report said.

In addition to the ongoing demand, it said that the rapid advancement of GenAI, which requires higher computational power and low latency than traditional cloud computing functions, will also provide tailwind to the data centre demand in India. *—PTI*

L&T gets order for K9 Vajra-T artillery platforms

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

Infrastructure major Larsen & Toubro (L&T) on Monday said it has bagged a major order from the Defence Ministry for the supply of K9 Vajra-T Artillery Platforms to the Indian Army.

According to the company's project classification, the 'major' order values between Rs 5,000 crore-10,000 crore.

The K9 Vajra-T is a 155 mm, 52-caliber tracked self-propelled artillery platform, adapted from the world's leading South Korean self-propelled howitzer K9 Thunder. Co-developed by L&T and Hanwha Aerospace, it has been customised to suit the requirements of the Indian Army for operations in varied terrains, including deserts, plains and high-altitude regions. *—PTI*

PERSONAL SATISFACTION

90% Indians prefer in-person car purchases

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

A recent global study by Urban Science has revealed that the majority of car buyers in India continue to favour traditional physical dealerships for their vehicle purchases. The survey involved over 9,000 participants from countries including the US, Germany, the UK, China, India, and Mexico, and highlighted the importance of trust and relationship-building in the Indian car-buying process.

According to the findings, nearly 90 per cent of Indian car buyers are inclined to visit physical dealerships, underscoring the significance of in-person interactions in their decision-making. The study emphasised that for Indian consumers, the act of purchasing a car is not merely transactional; it is often a familial and personal experience that digital platforms cannot replicate.

The study emphasised that for Indian consumers, the act of purchasing a car is often a familial experience *PHOTO: X*

Dealerships serve as vital spaces where trust is established, agreements are personalised, and after-sales support is effectively provided. This thriving relationship between consumers and dealerships underlines their indispensable role in the car-buying journey.

While digital platforms are becoming increasingly relevant, particularly among younger, tech-savvy consumers who often research online before visiting showrooms, the survey suggests that the future of car buying in India will be a blend of both digital and traditional approaches. This hybrid model aims to leverage the benefits of each method, satisfying evolving consumer expectations while maintaining the trust and personal connection that come with in-person interactions.

As automakers expand their physical networks in response to this enduring preference, striking the right balance between digital innovation and traditional practices will be crucial. The survey findings indicate that, despite the steady rise of online interfaces, the human element remains central to the Indian automotive experience. *—PTI*

TELECOM SUBSCRIBER BASE IN INDIA SEES DECLINE IN OCTOBER

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has released its subscription data for October 2024, revealing a decline of 33 lakh active subscribers across the country.

The broadband segment also saw a marginal decline, with total subscribers decreasing from 944.40 million in September 2024 to 941.47 million in October 2024, registering a decline rate of 0.31 per cent.

Wired broadband, however, showed growth, rising from 43.63 million to 44.66 million subscribers, an increase of 2.37 per cent. Conversely, fixed wireless connections such as Wi-Fi and Wi-Max dropped significantly by 22.72 per cent, while mobile device users fell by 0.42 per cent to 896.05 million.

Wireless subscriptions, which form the bulk of India's telecom base, declined from 1,153.72 million in September 2024 to 1,150.42 million in October 2024, registering a monthly decline rate of 0.29 per cent.

Both urban and rural wireless subscriptions saw decreases, with urban areas shrinking by 0.41 per cent and rural areas by 0.14 per cent.

Reliance Jio continued to lead in both wired and wireless broadband markets. *—ANI*

Rugby Premier League set to start next year

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

Rugby India, the sport's national governing body, is all set to launch the Rugby Premier League (RPL) next year. The tournament, the world's first franchise-based rugby league, featuring six city-based teams, will be a part of a 10-year strategic partnership between Rugby India and GMR Sports. The RPL will be a platform for top players from elite rugby nations around the world to showcase their talent and skills. The league aims to lay a solid foundation for the growth of rugby in India. By exposing young Indian talent to international players and top-tier coaching, the RPL will work towards creating a sustainable ecosystem for the sport. —*PTI*

Vinod Kambli hospitalised, has clots in brain

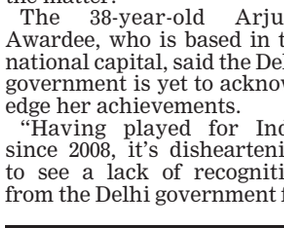
NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

Vinod Kambli, the former Indian cricketer and long-time teammate of Sachin Tendulkar, was hospitalised over the weekend after his health worsened. He was admitted to Akriti Hospital in Thane late Saturday. While his condition is stable, it remains critical. After a series of examinations the medical team found clots in his brain. Kambli recently revealed he is battling a urine infection and credited his wife and children for supporting him through the recovery process. Former cricketer Ajay Jadeja also visited him at the hospital. —*Agencies*

High strain could make players skip games: Donald

MUMBAI, 23 DEC

South African legend Allan Donald on Monday said it would not surprise if players begin skipping leagues and even international assignments due to mounting physical strain caused by a jam-packed schedule. With the third edition of the SA20 impending, SA will enter a crucial two-Test series against Pakistan with their qualification for the World Test Championship final at stake with several of their bowlers injured. Anrich Nortje (fractured toe), Lungi Ngidi (groin), Gerald Coetzee (groin), Nandre Burger (lower back stress fracture) and Lizaad Williams have been sidelined. —*PTI*



Two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu embarked on a new journey in life as she tied the knot with entrepreneur Venkata Datta Sai in a ceremony, in Udaipur on Monday

Team not able to take 20 wickets: Pujara

Mumbai off-spinner Tanush Kotian replaces Ashwin in Test squad against Australia

MELBOURNE, 23 DEC

The Indian team in Australia lacks a bowling attack that is good enough to take 20 wickets in a Test, Cheteshwar Pujara said on Monday and called it the side's biggest concerns heading into the last two matches of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

The five-match series is currently levelled at 1-1 with everything to play for in the Tests in Melbourne and Sydney.

The visitors have been relying heavily on pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah to get them wickets and while he has been a great success with both the red and pink ball, the peerless fast bowler has not received enough support from the other end, something that has plagued India besides their top-order batting woes.

"Now, there is a weakness in the bowling, so what will you feed the team? That is the biggest question, because you can't drop Nitish, you can't drop Jadeja, so what will be the team combination?"

"We will have to think about that, because if you want to win a Test match, then you have to take 20 wickets, and the ability to take 20 wickets is not that good, the supporting role of the other bowlers is not good, so we will have to improve that as soon as possible, and how that will be, I don't know, but that is a big question."

The five-match series is currently levelled at 1-1 with everything to play for in the Tests in Melbourne and Sydney **PHOTO: X**

Meanwhile, Mumbai off-spinner Tanush Kotian is set to join the India squad in Australia as a replacement for the recently retired Ravichandran Ashwin.

Kotian, who is currently in Ahmedabad for Vijay Hazare Trophy, is expected to leave Mumbai on Tuesday and will reach Melbourne before the start of Boxing Day Test.

Meanwhile, Indian team has expressed dissatisfaction with the practice pitches ahead of the fourth Test against Australia, blaming their variable bounce for the hit that Rohit Sharma took on his knee but MCG curator Matt Page has defended the tracks by saying that "standard protocol" has been followed. —*PTI*

Webster, Abbott are 'men in waiting'

MELBOURNE, 23 DEC

> **Strike rotation and solid defence are the key to face Bumrah**
>
> -Simon Katich, ex- cricketer

Sean Abbott and Beau Webster are linked by a common thread. They are just about there but not quite there when it comes to selection in Australia's final Test eleven.

They get summoned for national duty, attend nets and then go back to domestic commitments, only to be called back again raising hope of wearing that elusive Baggy Green.

Abbott, 32, has played 56 International games since his white ball debut a decade ago, but is still waiting to wear the whites and hold a red Kookaburra.

Webster, 31, is a proper domestic doyen with 93 games under his belt in which he has made 5297 runs and grabbed 148 wickets.

Webster knows he is good but also knows that the team thinks Mitch Marsh may be slightly better although the former looked way more assured with the willow than 'Bison'.

Similarly, Abbott said he is not even the fourth but the fifth choice in pecking order of Australian pacers. —*PTI*

India defeated West Indies in 2nd Women's ODI on Tuesday **PHOTO: X**

Momentum on their side, India eye series victory against WI

VADODARA, 23 DEC

Coming off one of their biggest wins in terms of runs, fancied India will look to guard against complacency when they take on a beleaguered West Indies side with an aim to bag the three-match series in the second Women's ODI on Tuesday.

India will be entering the game on the back of a massive 211-run victory over the visitors in the series opener in which the Harmanpreet Kaur-led team ticked almost all the boxes.

Every match the teams play in the coming months will be significant as the ICC World Cup is scheduled to be held in the country next year.

India, who have never won a women's World Cup, are desperate to end their ICC title drought at home and they are aware that a strong build-up is extremely important for them to head into the mega event as one of the contenders alongside the 'usual suspects', Australia and England.

Though India have not begun their preparations for the big tournament in earnest, having suffered a 0-3 whitewash in Australia, they bounced back in style, albeit against a much weaker opposition in the West Indies.

The lone worry for India before the series opener was the fitness of Kaur, who missed the last two T20Is with a knee niggle, but with her clean hitting and running between the wickets, the skipper has laid all concerns to rest. —*PTI*

Pakistan win ODI series against SA

JOHANNESBURG, 23 DEC

Pakistan completed a 3-0 sweep of its ODI series against South Africa, winning the third match by 36 runs under the DLS method.

Opener Saim Ayub hit 101 runs in 94 balls as Pakistan scored 308-9 at the Wanderers in a game reduced to 47 overs by rain. South Africa was all out for 271 in 42 overs in pursuit of a winning target of 308.

Pakistan batted first after losing the toss and was 1-1 when it lost Abdullah Shafique in the first over. The innings took off with Ayub involved in two key stands — 114 runs for the second wicket with Babar Azam (52 in 71), and 93 runs for the third with captain Mohammad Rizwan (53 in 52).

The 22-year-old Ayub, who scored 109 in the first ODI, was caught behind against debutant Corbin Bosch. Ayub hit two sixes and 13 fours. Middle-order batter Salman Agha padded the total with a 33-ball 48.

Pakistan beat South Africa in the third match by 36 runs **PHOTO: PTI**

Pakistan had already secured the one-day international series, winning the opener by three wickets and the second ODI by 81 runs.

South Africa won the three-match Twenty20 series 2-0. The teams will play two tests, starting Thursday at Centurion.

Pakistan's fifth successive bilateral ODI series win puts it in good stead for the Champions Trophy it will host in February. —*PTI*

KHO KHO WC TO FEATURE 21 MEN'S & 20 WOMEN'S TEAMS

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

A total of 21 men's teams and 20 women outfits will compete in next month's Kho Kho World Cup with the sport's governing body increasing the number of participating teams due to an overwhelming interest. India will host the inaugural edition of the event at the IGI Stadium from 13 to 19 January.

Initially, 16 men's and 16 women's teams were scheduled to participate. Teams from six continents -- Asia, Africa, North America, South America, Europe, and Oceania -- will feature in the much-anticipated tournament.

The opening ceremony will take place on 13 January, followed by the first match of the tournament between India and Pakistan. —*PTI*

Liverpool thrash Tottenham by 6-3

LONDON, 23 DEC

Liverpool heads into Christmas with a four-point lead, a game in hand and as the overwhelming title favorite in the Premier League on the back of a wild 6-3 win at Tottenham.

As for Manchester United and its new manager Ruben Amorim, they stumble into the festive period in 13th place — as low as they've been at Christmas since the 1989-90 season — and with a familiar sinking feeling.

United lost 3-0 at home to Bournemouth for the second straight season, the latest statistic to show just how far this English giant has fallen and the job Amorim has to turn around its fortunes.

Worse for United, it seems like great rival Liverpool cannot be stopped.

Make that 21 games in all competitions without defeat after the Reds' biggest league win of the season, with Mohamed Salah netting two of the goals to move above Manchester City's Erling Haaland to the top of the scoring charts.

Liverpool has 39 points from 16 games and stretched its lead over second-place Chelsea, which could only draw 0-0 at Everton, to end a five-match winning streak in the league.

Goal festSalah now has 15 goals in the Premier League to break a tie with Haaland — and will leave London thinking he should have had more.

Liverpool moved four points clear at the top of the Premier League table with a 6-3 thrashing of Tottenham Hotspur on Sunday evening **PHOTO: X**

- As for Manchester United and its new manager Ruben Amorim, they stumble into the festive period in 13th place — as low as they've been at Christmas since the 1989-90 season

United left out Marcus Rashford for the third straight match.

Another recently hired Premier League manager, Ivan Juric, began life at Southampton with a 0-0 draw at Fulham. —*PTI*

MBAPPÉ BACK TO HIS SCORING STREAK

MADRID, 23 DEC

Kylian Mbappé added to his scoring streak with a superb strike in Real Madrid's 4–2 win over Sevilla in the Spanish league to finish the year on a positive note after hitting what he called "rock bottom" in early December.

Mbappé sent a right-footed shot into the upper corner 10 minutes into the match for his fourth goal in as many games with Madrid in all competitions. It was Mbappé's sixth goal in his last eight matches with Madrid.

Mbappé said his lowest point came when he missed a penalty kick in the team's 2–1 league loss at Athletic Bilbao on 4 December.

"I know I have a lot more to give," Mbappé said on Sunday.

"The last few games I've played better, I took a lot of positives from the Bilbao game, when I hit rock bottom," the Real Madrid said.

The France star said made him realise "I have to give my all for this jersey and play with personality." —*PTI*

Game Changers Falcons win World Tennis League

ABU DHABI, 23 DEC

The Game Changers Falcons staged a remarkable comeback to register a 20-16 victory over TSL Hawks and clinch the World Tennis League Season 3 title here.

Despite losing the first two sets - women's doubles and women's singles – Falcons dominated the men's doubles and men's singles to bag the title.

In a rematch of the season opener, Falcons' Elena Rybakina and Caroline Garcia began strongly, but errors at crucial junctures saw them losing the women's doubles set 6-7 to Hawks' Aryna Sabalenka and Mirra Andreeva.

Teenage sensation Andreeva carried her fine form into the women's singles against Rybakina, closing out the set 6-2 extending Hawks' overall lead to 13-8.

In the men's doubles, Game Changers Falcons' Andrey Rublev and Denis Shapovalov dominated the entire set against Hawks' Sumit Nagal and Jordan Thompson, sealing it 6-2. —*PTI*

CM ATISHI SEEKS DIALOGUE

Chess player Tania rues lack of recognition from Delhi govt

NEW DELHI, 23 DEC

Olympiad gold-winning Indian chess player Tania Sachdev on Monday lamented the "lack of recognition" from the government of Delhi, prompting Chief Minister Atishi to reach out to her for "thoughts and suggestions" on the matter.

The 38-year-old Arjuna Awardee, who is based in the national capital, said the Delhi government is yet to acknowledge her achievements.

"Having played for India since 2008, it's disheartening to see a lack of recognition from the Delhi government for achievements in chess.

States that support and celebrate their champions, directly inspire excellence and motivate talent.

Sadly, Delhi has yet to take this step," she posted on her 'X' account.

"In 2022 Chess Olympiad I came back with a historic team bronze and an individual medal. Two years later 2024, the historic Chess Olympic gold, and till date there has been no acknowledgment or recognition by the state govt," she said.

She tagged Atishi and her ruling Aam Aadmi Party supremo Arvind Kejriwal, urging them to support the state's chess players.

Atishi responded to her post by inviting her for a conversation, while insisting that her government has been supportive of sporting talent.

"Hi Tania, we have always supported all our athletes, sportsmen and sportswomen, especially in our schools. Would love to meet you and understand what more can be done especially for chess players," Atishi said.

"My office will reach out to you and I am really looking forward to hearing your thoughts and suggestions," she added. —*PTI*

Tania Sachdev **PHOTO: PTI**

Max Purcell suspended for doping violation

MELBOURNE, 23 DEC

Two-time Grand Slam winning doubles player Max Purcell has entered a voluntary provisional suspension under tennis' anti-doping rules.

Max Purcell **PHOTO: X**

The International Tennis Integrity Agency announced the sanction in a statement on Monday after the 26-year-old Australian admitted to violating Article 2.2 of the Tennis Anti-Doping Program "relating to the use of a Prohibited Method".

Purcell posted a statement on Instagram saying he had "unknowingly received an IV infusion of vitamins above the allowable limit of 100 ml."

The ITIA said the suspension came into effect on 12 December, and time served under provisional suspension will be credited against any future sanction. —*PTI*

Ex-AIFF secy files plaint against prez over financial loss

T'PURAM, 23 DEC

Shaji Prabhakaran, the former secretary of the All India Football Federation (AIFF), has lodged a formal complaint against AIFF President Kalyan Chaubey with the Ethical Committees of the AIFF, the Asian Football Confederation, and FIFA, alleging "unethical practices" that have caused financial losses.

In his formal complaint dated 22 December, 2024, Prabhakaran also accused Chaubey of nepotism and even misusing the brand of FIFA without prior approval from the international body.

When contacted by PTI for a reaction on Prabhakaran's allegations, Chaubey declined to comment. —*PTI*